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Postsecondary degree attainment for American Indian college students at predominantly White institutions has consistently been the lowest among any ethnic and/or racial group for the past three decades. A plethora of studies have been conducted to examine the experiences of Native students at mainstream institutions within the conceptual framework of Vincent Tinto's interactionalist's theory whether in segments or in its entirety. Tinto's model considers, among other variables, prematriculation characteristics and dispositions of students including the influence of family, postsecondary aspirations, components of informal and formal academic integration, and the phenomenon of transient transition of students through institutional assimilation. Today, the retention and graduation of college students is the bedrock of conversations on quality and accountability in the field of higher education and Tinto's model has served as one of the catalysts for policy and program development in this area of study. In keeping with this model, this study examines the experiences of American Indian college students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) to determine the applicability of this particular model and its Western paradigm to an examination of Indigenous students.

NAVIGATING MAINSTREAM HIGHER EDUCATION: EXAMINING THE
EXPERIENCES OF NATIVE STUDENTS USING
TINTO'S INTERACTIONALIST'S MODEL

by

Billie Jo Graham Harrington

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Approved by

Leila E. Villaverde
Committee Chair

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Leila E. Villaverde

Committee Members Stanley Knick

Misti Williams

Camille Wilson

February 23, 2012

Date of Acceptance by Committee

February 23, 2012

Date of Final Oral Examination

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*For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord.
They are plans for good . . . to give you a future and a hope.
Jeremiah 29:11 (TLB)*

First and foremost, I give all honor and glory to God—The Great Creator and Author of All Knowledge. My strength and endurance to achieve this goal is a gift. There are no words to represent my appreciation for His love and mercy.

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It is important to recognize the work of our elders, past and present, in the field of American Indian education. A special thank you to the Native students in this study.

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I can do all things through Christ . . .
Philippians 4:13

PREFACE

Significance of This Study

The history of American Indian education is marred with the struggles of a people fighting for an equal footing in mainstream educational systems. Generations of Native elders have challenged these Eurocentric frameworks that even today impede the educational attainment of American Indians—perhaps more than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States. Educational attainment rates for Native people, including postsecondary education, are far below all other ethnic minorities. Without question, educational attainment is critical for American Indians. It is a pathway to economic self-sufficiency and fulcrum for political and social equality. In the infamous words of Chief Manuelito, Hastiin Ch'ilhaajinii (1818-1893), “My grandchild, education is the ladder. Tell our people to take it.” This ladder is a foundation for sovereignty in Indian Country.

For Native students enrolled in American colleges and universities, matriculation is not the most pressing challenge facing these students, staying retained at the institution to graduation is. The challenges that Native students face at mainstream institutions are significant. This study examines the engagement characteristics of Native students at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke within the context of Tinto's interactionalist's theory and discusses the various methods that these students have employed in order to navigate the culture and values of the University.

Defining and Clarifying Terms

As a preface, I include in this section defined terms of cultural significance to this study. In a multicultural society, where the boundaries of race are virtually transparent, clear definitions of race and culture are required to rebuff the whiles of prejudice and discrimination, which often exist and are perpetuated by insufficient and erroneous knowledge of race and culture. For example, many elders in my community, who were reared in a tri-racial county of Indian, White and Black citizenry would limit the term *Indian* to an individual of American Indian descent. Their frame of reference is defined by their limited knowledge of race in their tribal community. In today's society, persons from India may also be referenced as *Indians*. I would add that the term *Indian* is most commonly used within tribal communities and not typically used by non-Natives in the pejorative to reference American Indian people.

Additionally, it is important to note that Native scholars may use certain terms simply as a personal preference and as such, I may incorporate the use of a particular vernacular for my writing while another Native scholar may elect a different compilation of terms. For example, as my personal preference, I use the term *American Indian* instead of *Native American* while many students in this study will prefer to use the term *Native American*. The following section will delineate the use of cultural terminology for this study.

American Indian or Native American: Throughout this work, the term *American Indian* is used as an identifier for those of indigenous cultural and ancestral heritage. The terms *Native* or *Indigenous* are incorporated interchangeably. These terms will be

capitalized only when used to collectively describe American Indian and Alaskan Native people (e.g. *Native peoples* and *Indigenous scholars*) and in other references such as *native communities* or *indigenous knowledge*; the lower case version will be incorporated. In my tribal community, the term *Indian* is commonly used to reference Lumbee Indians and it is the widespread practice of many Native scholars to use this term as a descriptive term to reference all American Indians.

Wilkins and Stark (2011), well-respected scholars in American Indian Studies, challenge the use of the term *Native American* as noted, “. . . despite that term’s popularity among mainstream academics in recent decades, since it creates more confusion than the one it purports to replace, as it can be applied literally to any person born in the Americas” (p. xvii). The authors add, “. . . there is no single term that is acceptable by all Indigenous people all the time . . .” (p. xvii). There are Indigenous scholars who use the term *Native American* and *American Indian* interchangeably but only as a personal preference, I will use the term *American Indian* with *Native* and *Indigenous* as descriptive terms throughout this work, which references all tribal nations.

Tribe and People: It is important to reference specific tribal names (e.g. Lumbee, Waccamaw Siouan, and Tuscarora) when applicable. Natives often include their tribal affiliation in parenthesis after their name. The designation *Tribe* should be capitalized in these instances (e.g. *Lumbee Tribe*) and *tribe* in lower case is used in general discussions. When referencing *my Tribe* in the text, I am making specific reference to the Lumbee Tribe. I will also reference my tribal community within the context of *my People* with the term *People* capitalized as a designation for the *Lumbee Tribe*.

Tribal culture/tribal heritage: As an American Indian, the term *tribal culture* is used to define the system of learned and shared meanings that define my association with the Lumbee community. These norms, values and beliefs construct my position in the Tribe and not the stereotypical physical traits associated with society's perception of American Indians. The term *tribal heritage* is used to describe the customs and traditions passed from my ancestors, which will also serve as an inheritance to my children and generations to come.

Eurocentric/mainstream/dominant: The terms, *Eurocentric*, *mainstream*, *dominant*, are used to describe the male-dominated, Christian, European-descended culture that seeks to delineate and to define what is considered “normal” in society. Discussions of racial inequalities experienced by minority (subordinate) groups in society attribute these social injustices to the values and norms perpetuated by the dominant culture. Wilson (2008) explains, “The term dominant, like the culture that it describes and the society created by this culture, is not meant to include those who fall ‘outside’ the powerful majority...” (p. 35). In mainstream culture, Caucasian features (e.g. fair skin tone, light eyes, and blond hair) are often markers for association with the dominant culture.

White and Black vs. white and black: According to American Psychological Association (APA) style rules, “Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized” (APA, 2010, p. 75). In this study, the terms *White* and *Black* will be capitalized and author quotes will remain in lower case.

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CHAPTER I

THE STATE OF INDIAN COUNTRY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The landscape of America in the last three years of economic uncertainty and political upheaval has been characterized by high un- and underemployment, severely limited access to financial credit, restricted access to healthcare and crippling state and federal budget deficits. Federal cuts have also resulted in further limiting the vocational training and educational attainment of many citizens seeking to position themselves with greater marketability in a limited and highly competitive job market. The unemployment rate in the United States hovered just under 10 percent for the last six months of 2010 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). The Census reported the 2009 poverty rate (43.6 million) as the largest number in the more than five decades since poverty estimates have been published (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 Highlights).

This sobering socioeconomic picture, a seemingly daily focus of our national media outlets, is not foreign to Indian Country. Historically, minority groups and particularly American Indians have ranked lowest among all other ethnic groups in terms of poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing and poor healthcare. According to the 2006 Census, 27 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native individuals lived in poverty compared to just 13 percent of the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The figure for American Indians residing on some reservations is significantly greater. For example, a number of tribes in the Great Plains Region, particularly in South Dakota,

reported unemployment rates of near 90 percent in 2005 (e.g. Oglala Sioux Tribe of Pine Ridge, 89 percent; Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, 88 percent; Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 86 percent) (U.S. Department of Interior, 2005). Comparatively, the national unemployment rate was 5.1 percent in 2005. The persistent socioeconomic disparities of the Natives on Pine Ridge Reservation, located in South Dakota, are such that a common media characterization of this location is “America’s Own Third World.”

During periods of economic distress, educational attainment becomes one of the most formidable factors to improving the socioeconomic status of citizens regardless of one’s social, ethnic or racial position in society. In 2009, individuals, 25 years of age or older, holding a Bachelor’s degree or more earned \$62,394 compared to \$32,272 earned by a high school graduate (including GED) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Since the 2007 economic downturn, the value of an education has become increasingly important to the large pool of unemployed and underemployed casualties of the recession. The transformation of the dire socioeconomic status of Native people hinges on improving the depth and breadth of educational attainment. Education is the key to moving this impoverished segment of American society from the lowest levels of poverty to the realization of self-sufficiency.

Higher education for the American Indian is an investment for the individual, their community and the nation. As previously referenced, a college degree provides opportunities for increased earnings for the graduate, thereby reducing the reliance on government (both state and federal) assistance. An educated Indigenous workforce offers a wide range of socioeconomic benefits that encompass improved quality of life for the

graduate and their family to increase tax revenues and reduced crime rates in their tribal community.

An individual with a bachelor's degree or higher has the capability to earn at least four times the annual income of a high school dropout and more than twice the annual income of a high school graduate. Despite the improved socioeconomic status for college graduates, the benefit for Native graduates does not always equal that of their non-Native counterparts. Table 1 shows that earnings of American Indians, age 25 and older lag behind the U.S. population average at all various educational categories.

Table 1

Average Income for U.S. Population and American Indians Age 25 and Older by Educational Attainment

Educational Level	U.S. Population	American Indians
All educational levels	\$35,187	\$22,856
Less than a high school diploma	\$14,640	\$10,534
High school graduates, no college	\$24,811	\$20,721
Some college, no degree	\$31,726	\$25,966
Bachelor's degree or higher	\$57,330	\$45,214

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2007, Table 7. Note: Figures include individuals with no earnings

Educational Attainment in Mainstream Society

K-12 Pipeline Issue

Access to quality secondary and post-secondary education is a means to closing the socioeconomic gap between American Indian tribes and mainstream society. An earned degree in higher education represents a principle driver for the enhancement of

American Indian communities. Higher education attainment increases employment opportunities; therefore increasing earning potential of American Indian graduates—both of which increase tax revenue resulting in increased economic activity in the community and region. It is critical to recognize that a degree in higher education is one of the first steps toward self-sufficiency, but this path must begin with a strong foundation in secondary education. The K-12 pipeline is a critical component to begin discussions in American Indian education.

In a survey of the literature for American Indian student retention, Larimore and McClellan (2005) state, “the problem of retention does not begin with college enrollment” (p. 18). A significant gap exists in the educational achievement levels of American Indian students and the general student population despite gains attained in various avenues of education reform. The educational community would surely agree that the majority of students enrolled in American high schools are not performing at levels necessary to prepare them to succeed in twenty-first century’s global society. This is particularly true for young American Indians. In fact, the data reveal that American Indian dropout rates have reached crisis levels.

Youth who do not obtain a high school diploma are more likely to be unemployed and earn less when they are employed than those who complete high school. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a division of the U.S. Department of Education’s Division of Education Sciences defines dropout status as “the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in high school and who have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or equivalency credential such as a GED).” The status is

further characterized as civilian and noninstitutionalized, which means individuals in the military or those incarcerated are not included in the dropout statistic (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, NCES 2008-084).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) produces a report on the status and trends in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Among the various data represented in this latest report, American Indian/Alaska Natives (15 percent) were more likely to have dropped out of school than White (7 percent), Black (11 percent), Asian (3 percent) or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (7 percent) peers in 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, NCES 2008-084).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) reports annually to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on the dropout events and rates in North Carolina public schools. Recent data from 2009-10 records 16,804 dropout events in grades 9-12, which represents the lowest number recorded in North Carolina. American Indian males have the second highest dropout rate (5.65%) behind Black males (5.79%) in North Carolina (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2009-10, Figure D8, p. 112).

This critical issue of high school dropout rates is particularly relevant today as many states have witnessed a substantial decrease in manufacturing and other blue-collar labor employment opportunities. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2004) suggests that states should develop policies to increase the number of educated citizens for improvements in economic and workforce development. This emerging trend has resulted in a shift to improve state's K-16 educational systems.

“Educational capital has a direct impact on a state’s economy and quality of life” (p. 1).

The Center cites the following benefits to the state as a result of an educated workforce:

- Individuals with higher degrees can expect to earn higher incomes. The result: more tax revenue and economic activity for the state.
- An educated, skilled population makes fewer demands on social services such as welfare and corrections. The result: less expense to the state.
- People with more education make more informed health and lifestyle choices. The result: state savings in public resources.
- Educated individuals are more comfortable handling decisions about health care, personal finance, and retirement. The result: less government responsibility in those areas. (National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education, 2004, p. 1)

The Center challenges states to establish policies that will address the K-12 pipeline issues. The key to fostering a highly educated workforce is to increase the number of students graduating from high school and persisting to college degree attainment. The economic benefit of an educated workforce directly validates the expense to improve educational attainment in states. Such policies are more critical for states like North Carolina, particularly in Robeson County (30.4 percent), where the percent of persons living below the poverty level is more than twice that of the state (14.6 percent) and national (13.2 percent) statistic (U.S. Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, 2009). In 2009, more than 64 percent of the population in Robeson County was non-White and nearly 38 percent of this total was American Indian and Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, 2009). The economic benefit of education

has a wide-range of impact, which extends beyond the individual, their community, the state and even the nation.

Factors Limiting Educational Access

The current political and socioeconomic climate in the United States does not constitute the full array of limitations impeding the educational attainment of American Indian populations. The history of American Indian education has been hampered by numerous factors, which have limited the educational access of Native peoples in contemporary mainstream educational processes. These factors impact how Native people view U.S. educational systems and certainly the manner in which they function within a system that was historically created to minimize, marginalize, and in many ways completely eradicate tribal heritage, cultural beliefs and values.

Lomawaima (2000) states, “The history of American Indian education can be summarized in three simple words: battle for power” (p. 2). The literature describing the history of American Indian education is mapped within the context of the following power struggles: power exercised by the colonial settlers over American Indians; power exercised by the federal government over American Indians; and the struggle of American Indians to regain power taken away from them. All of which represent the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors that continue to limit the educational attainment of Native students in mainstream institutions. Remnants of colonial ideologies that served as the bedrock of U.S. public education continue to invalidate the worth of American Indians and tribal culture. This is representative in the exclusion of American Indians, their history, culture, values, accomplishments and contributions from curricula,

inadequate number of Native teachers in the classroom and exclusion from relevant research studies.

Timothy Begaye, in a foreword to the Grande (2004) work, describes the proper indigenous educational setting incorporated by tribal nations to educate their youth. The learning environment for Indian children is not limited to the Eurocentric one-teacher/one classroom model of early mainstream educational settings. Begaye asserts, “. . . by the time the child reached adulthood, he or she was learned in ways taught by family and clan members—a diverse education” (p. viii). Native ways of teaching and learning represent a holistic approach toward the education of the Indian child. A holistic approach to learning involves establishing relevant connections between the life of the child and the curriculum. This process exists within the context of incorporating tribal culture into virtually every aspect of the learning experience. A history of success, as evidenced in the achievement levels in tribal schools, in educating Indian youth is grounded in these Native ways of knowing.

Conversely, the dominant culture invalidates the worth of any culture contrary to Anglo-Saxon ideologies, which serve as the reference points to define mainstream education. For American Indians, the history of Indian education exists within the constructs of a system purposely established to eradicate tribal cultures and thereby limiting educational access in mainstream settings. The expectation that Native people should abandon a history of understanding the manner in which to educate their children for a way contrary to their heritage perpetuates the struggles manifest and indicative of American Indian education.

Despite failures to assimilate Native people to Eurocentric ideologies, mainstream educational systems continue to exist within a framework defined by the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. Contrary to the indigenous ways of teaching and learning, U.S. public educational settings limit the educational access and equity for American Indian populations. This dissertation will examine some of the key historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors that limit the educational attainment of American Indians in mainstream educational settings.

Historical Factors

This section will serve as a cursory review of some of the key historical factors that pre-date the establishment of K-12 public schooling. American Indian education will be positioned within the context of outlining the impact of colonization and indoctrination on American Indian populations. The framework of this historical review will examine American Indian education within the perspective of three periods: (a) impact of early colonization; (b) role of the federal government; and (c) journey to self-determination.

From colonial invasion to present-day *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the efforts of mainstream educational systems have been focused primarily on educating Indian youth through the inculcation of mainstream ideologies and typologies developed for teaching Caucasian students. Myriad authors have offered chronological accounts of the history of American Indian education (Fraser, 2001; Grande, 2004; Reyhner & Eder, 2004; Spring, 2008; Szasz, 1999). Despite the variations in mapping these perspectives, the prevailing theme for Native people focuses on power—power attempting to control

Indian education and the struggle to reclaim power to define education for Native youth. Lomawaima (2000) states, “For many generations, they have not been allowed to influence, let alone to determine, educational goals, policies, and practices within the schools that their children have been required to attend” (p. 2).

Grande (2004) offers a three-tier historical perspective of Indian education in terms of the “prevailing systems of power” (p. 12). Grande categorizes the periods in the following manner: (a) 16th–19th centuries as the missionary domination period; (b) late 19th–mid-20th centuries as the federal government domination period; and (c) mid-20th century to the present as the self-determination period. These categories are representative of the power struggle characterizing education in Indian Country to date. This quest to regain sovereign power may very well be the most significant fight undertaken for and by American Indian people.

Joel Spring (2008) focuses his inquiry of American Indian education on the missionary domination period in terms of the perceived lackadaisical efforts of the Virginia Company, one of the early colonial settlements, to educate Indians during early colonial settlement. The Virginia Company diverted funds collected by the Church of England and all its parishes for the purpose of educating “savage” Indians. The Church of England charged John Eliot, a missionary known as the “Apostle to the Indians,” with the task of converting Indians to Christian ideologies (p. 26). Religious intolerance characterized European American educational efforts to annihilate the existence of any non-White cultures. Responding to the rejection of Eliot’s missionary efforts, the Massachusetts General Court enacted a law in 1646 that required Indians to be informed

annually of their possible execution for their rejection of the Christian faith. “From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, most educators and Protestant ministers believed that Indians had to become ‘civilized’ to become Christian” (p. 27). Some of the most prestigious Ivy League schools (e.g. Harvard University in 1636, the College of William and Mary in 1693 and Dartmouth College in 1769) were established, in part, for the purpose of “de-Indianizing” American Indians (Grande, 2004, p. 11).

This movement to “de-Indianize” or civilize Native people was conceptualized by early colonial notions that Indigenous people were savages and should be transformed from their evil ways. It is ironic that early settlers fled to America to seek religious freedom from the imposition of values contrary to their own. Early forms of educating American Indians were based upon the very notion that Protestant values would serve as the vehicle to “de-Indianize” Native “savages.” The history of U.S. public schooling is grounded in the notion that the dominant culture defines education, including content and pedagogy, for all citizens. In other words, all non-Whites are incapable of defining what education should be for their own people. Hence, remnants of a system to “de-Indianize” continue to define mainstream education, which fails to fully incorporate the perspectives of tribal culture and other non-White heritage in the educational design.

Spring (2008) delineates the manipulative efforts of the federal government to “civilize” Indians through makeshift educational programs. Following the American Revolution, the U.S. government directed attention to expanding its territorial control by acquiring tribal land in the south and the west with as little expense to the government as possible. Educating Indians through civilization programs was a strategy developed under

President Washington's term and exercised by President Jefferson as well in attempts to convince Native peoples to sell their land to the government. Their ulterior motive was to encourage Native people to abandon their tribal heritage of reliance on the land to adopt the Eurocentric practices of animal husbandry, agriculture and acquiring possessions.

Grande (2004) speculates that the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830 was the instigation of the federal government period in the history of Indian education, even though missions maintained some level of control through the late nineteenth century. The Indian Removal Act authorized President Jackson to exchange tribal lands in the West for land in the eastern states. One result was the appointment of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Department of War. The primary duties of the Commissioner included overseeing the vocational focused Indian educational system and address any issues with tribes removed from eastern states. Commissioner T. Hartley Crawford designated manual labor schools as the best model for educating Indians in farming and homemaking (Reyhner & Eder, 1992).

Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) chronicle the origin of off-reservation Indian boarding schools funded and supported by the federal government in the late 1800s. The perceived disadvantage of the manual day schools was that Indian children were able to maintain a connection with their tribal heritage as they returned home each evening. Involvement with their tribal culture was an impediment to their complete acculturation in the dominant culture. Governmental officials deemed deculturalization would not be achieved without removing, at least temporarily, Indian children from their tribal

communities and its influences. The perception was that off-reservation boarding schools would facilitate “Americanizing” Indian children.

In 1879, Richard Henry Pratt established the first off-reservation Indian boarding school, Carlisle Indian School. Representative of the Eurocentric ideologies of many early colonists, Pratt believed the tribal way of life was “uncivilized” and therefore must be acculturated (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 47). His infamous slogan was “Kill the Indian and Save the Man.” Interestingly, Pratt was convinced that Indians would excel to the levels of whites if provided with “equal educational and vocational opportunities” (p. 48). This belief would soon be replaced with the notion that American Indian students were inferior to their White counterparts and most often labeled incapable of learning. These misguided fallacies would mar the history of Indian education and furthermore perpetuate the challenges that many Native students experience even today in mainstream educational settings.

Riney (2006) describes the transformation of Indian boarding schools from the financial struggles of the Depression and the attention resulting from the national investigation into American Indian affairs in the Meriam Report. Similar to the classic model of Carlisle, the Rapid City Indian School (1898-1933) focused on a “quasi-military” environment exercised to assimilate Indian children to culture and values (p. 132). The Office of Indian Affairs (later changed to the Bureau of Indian Affairs) set the curriculum adopted by Indian boarding schools but school administrators were allowed the autonomy to construct the framework for after-school student activities. Rapid City

Indian School modeled strict Protestantism under the direction of school superintendent Jesse F. House.

The younger superintendents after House (e.g. S.A.M. Young and Sharon R. Mote) worked to be more supportive of Rapid City's Indian populations, in that the school became a place where parents could send their children to be educated, fed, and looked after when they were experiencing challenging financial times (Riney, 2006). Boarding schools became the primary homes for many Indian children given up by families or forcibly removed from the home. This school became the saving grace for a great number of Indian children whose parents fell on challenging times during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Young was renowned as the transitional figure for shifting the school's culture from the military boarding school model to the "child-care provider of last resort" (p. 139).

After centuries of the miseducation of Indian children, Lewis Meriam was commissioned in the 1920s by the U.S. Department of the Interior to examine the education of American Indians after centuries of failure by federal legislation. Fraser (2001) depicts the 1928 Meriam Report as "a turning point of sorts and the beginning of a slow reorganization of federal priorities in Indian education" (p. 154). Meriam challenged the general philosophy and practice of federally operated Indian boarding schools' removal of Indian children from the home environment.

The Meriam Report outlined the following community model for tribal schools:

[The] modern point of view in education and social work lays stress on upbringing in the natural setting of home and family life. The Indian educational enterprise is peculiarly in need of the kind of approach that recognizes this

principle; that is less concerned with a conventional school system and more with the understanding of human beings.

The methods must be adopted to individual abilities, interests, and needs. Indian tribes and individual Indians within the tribes vary so greatly that a standard content and method of education, no matter how carefully they might be prepared, would be worse than futile. (p. 156)

Meriam discredited the necessity and use of standardized curriculum and textbooks. He asserted that American Indian children must find a direct correlation between the curriculum and their own life experiences. His analogy of the Indian child residing in the desert who is incapable of visualizing the relationship between the curriculum and the ship sailing on the sea represents one of the significant challenges with standardized testing for our American Indian children today (Fraser, 2001).

Szasz (1999) cites the late 1960s as the beginning of self-determination in American Indian education. This is the third period mapped in Grande's (2004) power-themed version of the history of American Indian education. For centuries, American Indian people have been stripped of the power to determine how their children would be educated. Lomawaima (2000) asserts

religious proselytizers within the mission schools, federal employees within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, or the state departments of education that supervise public schools have held the power to determine curricula, pedagogical practices, teacher training and hiring practices, language-instruction policies, disciplinary procedures, and so on. (p. 2)

Notwithstanding the strides made in Indian education, American Indians continue to experience limited access in U.S. public education—an impediment resulting from the remnants of a history of marginalization.

Sociopolitical Factors

Szasz (1999) describes a 1966 incident in which the National Congress of American Indians, led by Vine Deloria, Jr., lobbied the White House until Congress and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) involved Indians in the discussions pertaining to programs to benefit Natives. Szasz asserts that programs such as the OEO Head Start preschool program were successful because Indians were allowed to contribute to the planning and execution of such programs. “When Indian witnesses testified that their children ‘were being destroyed by the white man’s school system’ they were not saying anything new, but as these opinions became newsworthy they acquired more force” (p. 157). The silenced voices of American Indian parents, who knew how best to educate their children, were finally being legitimately recognized. Szasz adds that Indian leaders were functioning more strategically in the political arena through their experiences with the federal government. Publicity became the weapon of choice for effecting change in Indian education. These changes in Indian Country were hot topics in the national media realm.

N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) and Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) were leading this generation of activists and special-interest groups battling for change in Indian Country. For example, the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) held its inaugural meeting in 1969 and continues today as the premier professional organization focused on the advancement of Indian education. Members of the NIEA worked with legislators to write Indian education bills for Congress (Szasz, 1999). With this increased awareness of Native issues, many colleges and universities across the nation, such as

Pembroke State College in North Carolina, were establishing American Indian Studies programs.

Nearly one century after the Meriam Report, American Indian people continue to struggle to gain an acceptable position in mainstream education for their youth. Fraser (2001) cites inadequate government funding as the primary factor in the deficiencies in American Indian education. Under the current federal administration, the crisis in education is perpetuated by budget cuts and the “one size fits all” scope of legislation, which devalues diversity the diversity in the educational needs of American Indians and other minority groups. An ill-fitting and inappropriate system of educating Indian children has been forced upon Native people since early colonization. The disconnect between tribal culture and the ethos of mainstream educational settings most often presents a struggle for American Indian students.

This miseducation of American Indians is not perpetuated by a lack of knowledge of how to educate Indians. The federal government, state boards of education, local school administrators and even teachers clearly understand the issues hindering the educational access of American Indian students (and other students of color). Despite the available information on educating Native students, American Indians and other minority students continue to experience challenges to educational attainment in mainstream public school settings. The theory remains that U.S. policymakers are not considering this information to guide the development of education legislation. The federal government and other governing bodies operate under the notion that they know how best to educate

Native students, and thus, the cycle of limited educational access and equity for American Indian youth continues.

The New Face of Discrimination: White Privilege

More than one half-century beyond the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, American Indians and other underrepresented groups continue to experience and be disadvantaged by prejudice and discrimination in American schools, both public and private. However, the face of racism in twenty-first century America is often ingeniously disguised and remains concealed from society. The oblique disguise is such that it occasionally even eludes self-detection. Despite the manner in which racism and discrimination is unveiled, the outcome remains the same—these negative factors continue to limit the educational access and equity of American Indians in U.S. public education. This legacy of overt discrimination in miseducating Native students is now shifting to a more covert form of prejudice.

Cummins (1992) describes the racism experienced by American Indian students in mainstream educational systems that were created and controlled by the dominant society. Throughout the relatively brief history of American education, disparities in the educational achievement levels of American Indians have been attributed to stereotypical generalizations equating a position of inferiority to those in the dominant culture. According to Cummins, the dominant group engages in a conscious act of “victim-blaming” by citing high levels of alcoholism, questionable child-rearing practices, and distasteful hygiene (p. 3) as the principle barriers to educational, economic, and political “equality.” “Victim-blaming” in the most simplistic terms is just another way to

conveniently position Indigenous peoples in a place of continued inferiority to White America. As such, historically Anglo-Saxon educators were placed at the forefront of “civilizing” American Indian students.

Clearly, there exist challenges to and failures of an imperfect educational system that is based historically on racist religious and political ideologies. As a way of rationalizing and internalizing the clear inadequacies and failures of their own flawed educational approach, the dominant group will attempt to assign blame for such inadequacies and shortcomings to minorities themselves. This victimization creates an environment that inhibits adequate growth and development for American Indian students, and instead simply perpetuates the culture of discrimination.

Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, and Baeza (2006) posit, “At the classroom level, interactions between teachers and students with tribal backgrounds can be difficult due to teacher practices that are often in direct contrast to unique attributes prized in the student’s home and culture” (p. 16). Even though the history of American Indian education is scarred with systematic racism established specifically to annihilate indigenous cultures, remnants of the efforts to assimilate Native students remain in mainstream educational systems. Consequently, the covert racism in American schools contributes to the achievement gaps of not only American Indian students but also all non-White student populations expected to assimilate to schooling governed by the dominant culture.

Racism has transformed from the blatant representations of segregated school systems to more subtle manifestations of “color-blind racism” that work to disenfranchise

minorities in predominantly White educational systems. The dominant group will engage in myriad strategies to avoid confessing any form of racial discrimination. A body of literature identifies this trend as the exercising of White privilege. Bonilla-Silva (2006) states, “Shielded by color blindness, whites can express resentment toward minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic; and even claim to be the victims of ‘reverse racism’” (p. 4). Whites would assert that racial discrimination is nonexistent in twenty-first century America. Simply defined as ignoring matters of race, color-blind racists do not self-identify as prejudice because they “do not see race.” While the Brown ruling and other landmark court cases of the Civil Rights era achieved the end of segregation, it did not eradicate the racial discrimination in schooling. Color-blind racism exists as a sophisticated metamorphous of racial discrimination that continues to perpetuate inequality for students of color in American educational systems.

According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), the ideological framework supporting color-blind racism emerged in the late 1960s. The passage of numerous Civil Rights bills served as the fulcrum for the development of a “new racial order” (p. 16) to preserve the privilege of the dominant culture with more overt strategies of racial discrimination. American Indian college students often leave an environment rich in their Native culture to enter mainstream institutions where color-blind racism is the dominant theme to remain politically correct. Unknowingly, White faculty may often assert their allegiance to color blindness as a way to avoid the appearance of racism but in turn this serves to dismiss the value of American Indian cultures on mainstream college campuses.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) maintains, “. . . most whites endorse the ideology of color blindness and that this ideology is central to the maintenance of white privilege” (p. 14). A campus environment failing to provide opportunities to nurture the Native cultures of American Indian students perpetuates the same discriminatory mission of early schools—forced assimilation of Indian students to the dominant culture. Color-blind racism is a tool of discrimination used to reject the relevance of American Indian culture.

Non-Indian faculty, while striving to appear politically correct, perpetuates color-blind environments where power and privilege of the dominant group oppresses underrepresented groups. White privilege undergirds the power of deciding to ignore the relevance of other cultures. Johnson (2006) asserts, “Although privilege is attached to social categories and not to individuals, people are the ones who make it happen through what they do and don’t do in relation to others” (p. 54). Johnson explains that discrimination will maintain systems of privilege whether the intent is racially motivated or not. The problem with power and privilege is that Whites do not recognize the existence of their position of oppression against subordinate groups.

The exclusion of American Indian cultures in education was apparent in the discriminatory language of Civil Rights legislation as these addressed the equities of only Whites and Blacks. Mainstream education reinforced the exclusion of American Indians in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the requirement of a literacy test as a voting qualification based on Anglo-Saxon ideologies. This systemic component of the Civil Rights legislation was a form of institutional discrimination that functioned to

disenfranchise indigenous cultures and marginalize them from participation in democratic processes.

Civil Rights legislation was the springboard for African American citizens to gain access to mainstream education. In contrast, American Indians recognized mainstream education was designed to assimilate Indians to the ideologies of White society through the eradication of their indigenous cultures. The Civil Rights movement arrived in an era in American history when notions of equal rights and equity were associated with positions of “Whiteness.” This White/Black dichotomy also governed notions of fairness and equity in American society.

Johnson (2006) states, “. . . the dominant racial group has the cultural authority to define the boundaries around ‘white’ as it chooses. The same is true with the definition of what is considered ‘normal’” (p. 18). White politicians chose to address the racial inequities of minorities within the context of educational discrimination against Blacks. Thus, equality in educational attainment would continue to disempower non-Black minorities.

As the federal government acknowledged the political, social and economic necessity to at least provide the illusion of organization and rectification of racial inequality, American Indians and other non-Black minorities such as Hispanics were swept into the color-blind racism of this White/Black paradigm. Color-blind racism provides a “smoke screen” to hide the true feelings of discrimination. In today’s society, racism is constructed in a manner that guards the “bold face” of discrimination. Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts, “. . . most whites endorse the ideology of color blindness and that

this ideology is central to the maintenance of white privilege” (p. 14). I know a number of Whites whom self-identify as color-blind. What they fail to recognize is that this is simply another way of dismissing the rich history and cultures of American Indians and other people of color.

At the point of recognizing the role of power and privilege in the oppression of American Indian college students, strategies to incorporate Native cultures must transcend the “window dressing” that the concept of diversity has become for some institutions of higher education. Historically, the Eurocentric, dominant discourse of curriculum has served as the universal knowledge to silence the voice of minorities. Young (1998) asserts, “. . . those in positions of power will attempt to define what is to be taken as knowledge in society” (p. 14). Young theorizes dominate powers will “legitimize ‘their knowledge’ as superior” in an attempt to transform the ideologies of diverse student populations—particularly American Indian college students. Hence, American Indian college students become the proverbial “round pegs” forced to fit the “square holes” on predominantly White college campuses.

Current Discourse on Educational Diversity

In their zeal to address matters of diversity, institutions of higher education must incorporate opportunities for the inclusion of indigenous cultures to transition from the dominance of Eurocentric curriculum. The institution should provide courses in American Indian Studies. Courses in American Indian Studies will serve a dual role. One function is to promote the preservation of the Native cultures of American Indian students while providing them the platform to share their cultural perspectives in the

classroom setting, thereby enriching the content of the course. American Indian Studies courses promote the value of campus diversity by introducing the knowledge of indigenous cultures to non-Native students and even non-Indian faculty.

Yeskel (2008) asserts that “Class impacts education in myriad ways, including issues of access, academic preparation, and curricular content (Whose history? Whose literature?), pedagogy (What processes are used?), and standards (What standards and how they are measured?)” (p. 1). The answers to these questions are based on fundamental ideologies of European cultures in mainstream education with a primary and specific goal of assimilating non-White groups to the dominant culture. American Indian culture and heritage are given no place in this framework.

Despite efforts to mandate the incorporation of multiculturalism in U.S. public education, Native students continue to struggle to make a relevant connection with tribal cultures and mainstream curriculum. The current discourse on educational diversity is articulated in such generalized terms that American Indians are conveniently but thoughtlessly included under the umbrella of multiculturalism. The Eurocentric approach to pedagogy and curriculum design does not incorporate the cultural backgrounds and even learning styles of Native students. The lack of congruence between mainstream education and Native culture perpetuates the barriers to educational attainment for American Indian students.

As evidenced in the lowest retention and graduation rates of all other ethnic or racial group, American Indians are hindered by myriad factors that impede success in U.S. public education. The effects of a history of forced assimilation and indoctrination

continue to hinder the educational access and equity of Native students in mainstream education. Despite legislation to mandate equity in public education and the absence of discrimination, American Indians and other minority populations continue to experience the alienation and prejudice that most often contributes to the high rates of attrition of these groups. American Indians must feel their tribal culture is valued in mainstream educational settings.

Non-Indian schools, colleges and universities must identify the importance of Native perspectives in curriculum design. Other content area courses such as history, literature and religion should highlight aspects of American Indian cultures. For example, history courses should incorporate the contributions of great American Indian leaders such as Chief Joseph, a voice against the social injustices of American Indians and the great orator, Seneca Chief Red Jacket. Literature courses must blend the writings of well-known American Indian authors such as the famous novelist, James Welch (Blackfeet), N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene). An examination of religious cultures might include the variations among American Indian tribes and other Indigenous peoples around the world. White faculty must recognize the oppressive nature of failing to include Native perspectives in all content areas.

Delpit (1988) explains the importance of incorporating “differing perspectives” for the purpose of achieving “an understanding of the ‘silenced dialogue’” (p. 282). However, a key factor in achieving this level of inclusion does not limit the teaching of American Indian students to American Indian faculty. Delpit posits the significance of

“good teachers of all colors” (p. 282) who understand the importance of inclusiveness in classroom settings. School administrators, in secondary and post-secondary settings, inaccurately assume that rhetoric including the generic terms “diversity” or “multicultural” will suffice in addressing the needs of American Indian students. This fallacy fosters the marginalization of Native students in mainstream educational systems.

It is common practice for researchers to exclude data on American Indian students because they conclude the sample size is not statistically significant. Most often, minorities are represented in terms of African American and Hispanic populations. Research that excludes the representation of American Indian students in the data devalues this population of people. The validation of a research study, with a sufficient sample size, should never outweigh the representation of American Indians in any area of research. How are the disparities in the educational attainment of American Indian students to be addressed if they are excluded from the research?

Educational policymakers must examine American Indian education through a holistic lens. The holistic lens will consider the historical context as represented through the experiences and even opinions of Native people within the scope of U.S. public education. There is merit in understanding how mainstream educational settings have historically marginalized American Indian students by devaluing their tribal culture. Diversity rhetoric, encapsulating Native culture under the umbrella of multiculturalism, fosters the disconnect that Indian students often experience in predominantly White settings. Tribal nations recognized the value of educating their children long before early colonial invasion with these misguided notions of Indian education. The rise in self-

determination among Indian people shatters the generations of silent voices that should have guided the direction of Indian education.

The holistic lens for examining Indian education must consider the sociopolitical and cultural factors that impact Indian Country today. A legacy of broken promises by the federal government has left many tribal communities without sufficient means for addressing basic human needs—much less educating their children. Eurocentric public educational systems which devalue tribal culture and the rich diversity of other minority groups not only marginalize American Indians but restrict students to a one-dimensional view of society and the world. This one-dimensional view perpetuates the cycle of racism and prejudice that often serves to marginalize Native students and other minorities in public educational systems. Recognizing the past and present position of American Indians in U.S. educational systems is critical to increasing degree attainment for this population of students.

American Indian Higher Education

The Undergraduate Profile

The unique characteristics and challenges of American Indian students may contribute to their patterns of college attrition. The data represent one potential factor attributable to the high dropout rate of American Indians. The American Indian student is on average older than the traditional-aged (18-24 years) college student. In fact, more than one third of American Indian college students are 30 years of age or older. Frequently, this age group is categorized at a higher risk for potential dropout. With regard to gender, the majority of American Indian college students are women (63

percent). The national average for American undergraduates, regardless of ethnic classification, is 58 percent female. The national average for first-generation college attendance among undergraduates is 39 percent, whereas 41 percent of American Indian students are first-generation college students (IHEP, 2007).

The national average for financially independent undergraduate students is slightly greater than 50 percent, whereas, nearly two thirds (65 percent) of American Indian undergraduates are self-supporting. Twenty percent of these students were living on annual household incomes below \$20,000. Less than one in ten American Indian undergraduates live in households with annual incomes greater than \$80,000. The national average for this comparison is significantly higher (IHEP, 2007).

The care of dependent children is another challenge facing American Indian college students. Recent statistics reveal that 27 percent of all undergraduate students have dependent children compared to 35 percent of American Indian undergraduates. Additionally, data show that eight percent of American Indian students have the responsibility of dependent care other than children, compared to three percent of Caucasian students, seven percent of Hispanic students and 11 percent of African American students. These familial commitments may be the contributing factor to near 65 percent of all American Indian undergraduates living in off-campus housing compared to 55 percent of all undergraduates in off-campus housing (IHEP, 2007).

Maxwell (2001) addresses the challenges that are exclusive to American Indian students. Even though some of these challenges may be applicable to other minority groups, American Indians have additional obstacles specific to their tribal cultures. As

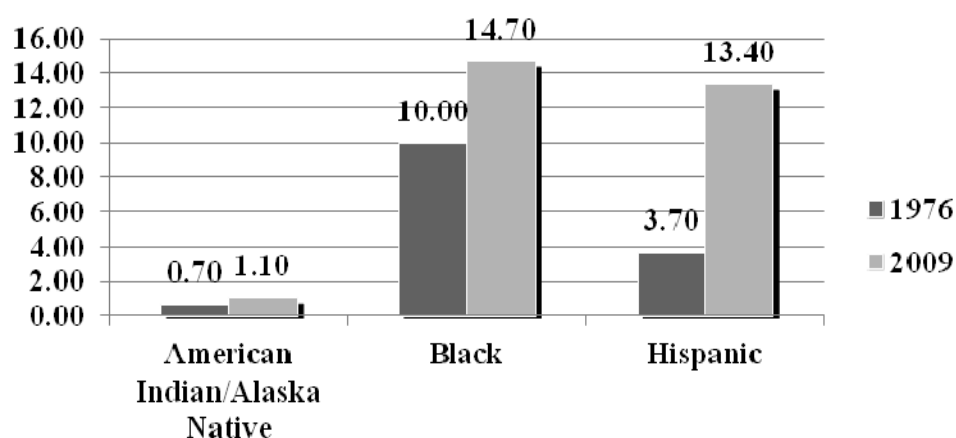
indicated previously, American Indian students have strong ties to their extended family, which are typically not common to the traditional non-Native nuclear family. These strong familial ties result in elevated levels of separation anxiety on occasions when American Indian students attend universities away from home.

The value system of the American Indian culture fosters certain traits that may be problematic for Indian students to easily or successfully acclimate into the higher education environment. Tribal elders promote a strong sense of personal independence that may ultimately result in loneliness and seclusion when the student refuses to seek help in adjusting to this new environment. Maxwell (2001) argues that the American Indian culture promotes group collaboration that directly conflicts with the individualistic atmosphere of many college campuses. In fact, she posits that the Navajo belief, “speaking up in class is perceived as bragging” (p. 2), suggests that drawing attention to oneself is contradictory to the ideology of group collaboration.

This distinct profile of the American Indian undergraduate suggests a set of complex challenges that may impede a student’s ability to easily obtain a college education. Familial and financial commitments, which often require full-time employment, make it necessary to find flexibility in class scheduling and other extra- and co-curricular activities associated with the college campus experience. The pressure to assimilate into mainstream environments, often conflicting with tribal culture, may result in internalized conflict that may hinder the Indian student from persisting and the completion of their academic degree program.

Mapping College Attendance Patterns

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to the condition of education in the United States, reports that minority enrollment in degree-granting post-secondary institutions more than doubled during the period of 1976 to 2007 (NCES 2009-020). Despite this commendable gain, American Indian students represented one percent or less of the total U.S. college student enrollment during this timeframe. Native students appear to be making progress in college enrollment when considered in isolation but when compared to other minority groups, the gains are miniscule (see Figure 1). Similarly, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred to Native students by degree-granting institutions in the 2007-2008 academic year represented more than two and one half time increase from the 1976-1977 academic year. However, this represents less than one percent of the total degrees conferred to all students in the U.S.



Source: Table A-8-3. Total undergraduate enrollment and percentage distribution of students in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, fall 1976-2009

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution Change in Minority Undergraduate Enrollment 1976-2009

The data collected and disseminated by national data clearinghouses provides institutions with information to formulate and implement programs necessary to address the low attrition, retention, and graduate rate behaviors of Native students. Entities, such as National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE), will include caveats of the limitations when comparing individual institutional data with national data collection. For example, care should be taken in attempting to determine specific institutional and student body characteristics when identifying potential peer institutions for worthwhile assessments of retention and graduation data. Demographic and academic profiles of the student populations are critical in the selection of peer institutions for national data comparison in reports from CSRDE. Central to the examination of factors contributing to the retention and graduation of American Indians are issues such as academic preparedness, part-time enrollment, financial status, age, and employment status.

Institutions must examine such reports carefully in order to identify salient characteristics and confounding trends in groups such as the critically low retention and graduation rates of American Indian students. One shortcoming of the CSRDE reports is that they do not address the retention and graduation data of American Indian students enrolled in tribal colleges and universities (TCUs). The next section of this chapter will examine the success rate of the American Indian students enrolled in TCUs and provide some suggestions for mainstream higher educational systems in correcting this longstanding problem of retaining and graduating American Indian students.

TCUs: Meeting the Needs of Native Students

In February 2007, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and the American Indian College Fund disseminated a report, *The Path of Many Journeys: The Benefits of Higher Education for Native Peoples and Communities*, commissioned by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), on the progress of tribal college and university alumni. The report provides a brief history of the origin of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The latter part of the twentieth century brought forth the Civil Right and Self-Determination movement when American Indian leaders determined that mainstream colleges and universities were failing in the education of American Indian students especially students from reservations. The concern for the education of their youth produced the Tribal College movement. In 1968, Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona was founded as the first tribal college. Later it was renamed Diné College (IHEP, 2007).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the federal government funded off-reservation boarding schools for the sole purpose of removing American Indian youth from their families and native cultures to “indoctrinate them into the white world” (IHEP, 2007, p. 1). The curriculum failed to incorporate any cultural aspects while maintaining a strict focus on the development of standard work skills. As our Native cultures strive to erase the scars of boarding schools, TCUs work to support the American Indian student in an atmosphere that encourages growth based on and respective of their native cultures.

Today, thirty-two Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States offer accredited degree programs in a wide range of disciplines (IHEP, 2007). The vast majority of TCUs are associate-degree granting institutions; however seven have been established as four-year baccalaureate institutions. Many TCUs have developed feeder programs with mainstream colleges and universities in an effort to provide additional opportunities for the transition from two-year programs to the baccalaureate degrees.

Robert G. Martin (2005) examines the success of serving American Indian students in TCUs in *Serving American Indian Students in Tribal Colleges: Lessons for Mainstream Colleges*. Martin cites American Indian College Fund (AICF) data that shows TCU student enrollment during 2003 to exceed more than thirty thousand. This represents a significant increase over the approximately twenty-five hundred American Indian students enrolled in 1982. Despite financial difficulties, inadequate academic facilities, and service to a larger at-risk population, TCUs have continued to experience enrollment growth and higher graduation rates than mainstream colleges and universities. The characteristics of most TCU students are an average age of twenty-eight; 64 percent are women; and a large number of these students are single parents. In spite of these difficult challenges, 86 percent of American Indian students at TCUs persist to the completion of a degree program. Furthermore, these tribal college graduates have a persistence rate of four times those students who did not attend TCUs.

Martin (2005) credits the success of tribal college students to the opinion that TCUs acknowledge the importance of individualized attention, create and implement culturally sensitive programs for American Indian students, and one of the most critical

factors is the role of family support services in the lives of each student. TCUs encourage activities to foster the role of the student in the context of culture, family and community. In reviewing the profile of American Indian students, many have strong familial responsibilities that require flexibility in class scheduling, dependent childcare facilities and increased financial aid programs. TCUs acknowledge these specific needs to provide necessary accommodation for their American Indian students.

Championing Success: A Report on the Progress of Tribal College and University Alumni, another report prepared by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) in 2006, presents an overview of survey information collected from American Indian College Fund recipients. The findings of these surveys reveal the numerous benefits of TCUs and the importance of financial aid sources to funding the path to a college education for American Indian students. The report reiterated the traditional profile of the American Indian college student—“having dependents, being older than 24, not enrolling continuously, working full time while enrolled, or a combination of more than two of these characteristics” (p. vi). The 2006 IHEP report emphasized the point that despite these non-traditional student barriers, fifty-seven percent of scholarship recipients graduated in two to three years and another eighteen percent completed their degree programs in four to five years (IHEP, 2006).

Survey respondents cited a number of reasons for their decision to attend TCUs. The number one reason centered on the importance of obtaining a college degree, followed by their desire to make a better life for themselves, their family, and the overall benefit of their tribe. The survey revealed that American Indian students experienced “a

sense of community and comfortable educational environment . . . while attending their TCU” (IHEP, 2006, p. 12). The high level of student satisfaction is one asset that contributes to the overall success of TCUs in the retention and graduation of American Indian students. Student respondents reported that faculty, in their role of “motivators, mentors, and support systems . . .” (pp. 17-18), were a significant element to their overall educational experience.

In the face of numerous challenges, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) strive to provide opportunities for American Indian students to continue their educational aspirations at four-year TCUs or mainstream institutions. Another driver is the desire to ensure that the education of these students is built upon Native tradition and grounded in culturally sensitive pedagogy. Their aim is to produce effective tribal leaders and productive citizens for increased economic development in poverty-stricken tribal communities. The leadership in TCUs acknowledges the value of interweaving Native culture in the educational experience. It would benefit mainstream institutions to thoroughly examine indigenous culture and the potential impact on the experiences of American Indian students in predominantly White colleges and universities.

Native Culture Defines College Experiences

Clyde Kluckhohn (1962), best known for his ethnographic work with the Navaho and his contributions to the development of theory of culture in the field of anthropology, said, “If those who intervene to change a culture in some of its particular aspects do not comprehend the dynamic interrelation of all its parts, they may breed confusion so disastrous as to offset every beneficent change they have tried to bring about” (p. 337).

Kluckhohn's contribution to the understanding of native culture developed through a 37-year ethnographic study with the Navajo. Initially, the goal of using American schools "to educate" American Indian youth was to eradicate tribal cultures for the purpose of assimilating to the dominant culture. Scholars in the field of American Indian education have identified this cultural conflict as one of the most significant factors contributing to the poor academic achievement of Native students. This section will examine how culture, a system of learned and shared meanings, serves as a frame of reference for understanding the experiences of American Indian college students in mainstream colleges and universities.

The preservation of tribal culture is imperative for the welfare and survival of American Indian nations. This could very well be viewed as one of the most significant and fundamental battles waged by American Indians since colonial contact. The battleground for this war is most prevalent in mainstream educational settings. The formal education (Western indoctrination) of American Indians was based upon the erroneous belief that Anglo-Saxons understood the manner in which to best educate non-White students. The work of Eleazar Wheelock and Samson Occom (Mohegan), founding Dartmouth College in 1769, was a representation of the most famous colonial efforts to educate Indigenous people (Spring, 2008).

Deficiencies in the formal education of American Indians can be traced to the crusades of early English colonists in the 1600s to assimilate "uncivilized" Indians to proper religious practices. The master plan to achieve this task was driven by the misguided belief that tribal cultures, their values and purpose, must be completely

eradicated from mainstream society. “Replacing the use of native languages with English, destroying Indian customs, and teaching allegiance to the U.S. government became the major educational policies of the U.S. government toward educating Indians . . .” (Spring, 2008, p. 193). The infamous slogan coined by Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the first off-reservation boarding school, was “kill the Indian and save the man.” Educational systems, in the form of these off-reservation boarding schools and in the homes of early religious colonists, became the makeshift concentration camps for attacking the core of tribal nations.

In the face of these obstacles for Indians to be educated in mainstream society, there are recognizable victories for American Indians in the history of Indian education. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) is one of the success stories in early American Indian education. The North Carolina General Assembly authorized the Lumbee Indian Tribe to establish the Indian Normal School in 1887 to train American Indian teachers. During the period of desegregation, this was the only state-supported four-year institution in the United States for American Indians. Today, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke is a master’s level degree-granting institution and one of 16 campuses that comprise the University of North Carolina system. The University continues to maintain a deep connection to the tribal history and culture of the Lumbee community.

The Bloomfield Academy (1852-1949) a boarding school for Chickasaw girls founded by the Chickasaw Indians and a group of missionaries challenged the derogatory boarding school images in the history of American Indian education. Cobb (1992)

presents the positive stories of Bloomfield alumni, one of which was her grandmother, Ida Mae Pratt Cobb. The history of Bloomfield was different from other boarding schools, in that, the Chickasaw felt that the school would provide the necessary skills to navigate in the White world. “The Chickasaw founded Bloomfield, not because the federal government demanded it, but because the Chickasaw people knew literacy training was crucial to their survival as a nation, to their preservation” (Cobb, 1992, p. 6).

Similar to other boarding school models operated by the federal government and religious enclaves, Bloomfield did serve as a tool of assimilation, but at the same time it also served to preserve the Chickasaw Nation by instilling in them a common bond and identity as Indians that remained solid despite the adoption of Eurocentric norms and values. However, their identities as Indians do not make them feel less American. In fact, most are patriotic citizens and proud of their country. For most of these women, having citizenship in two nations does not cause a conflict of identity; the two are very intertwined and mixed—they are American and Indians, they are American Indians (Cobb, 1992).

Similar to other Indian boarding schools, the Bloomfield Academy systematically dismantled the cultural identity of their students. However, in an attempt to preserve their tribal nation, the Chickasaw sought to contest the definition of tribal culture as represented in many tribes by Native languages and traditions. “But what were their choices? To change and continue on, or to resist and dissolve?” (p. 120). The Chickasaw chose the latter. Other tribal nations across the country opposed the assimilative tactics of the federal government and missionaries to eradicate indigenous culture and heritage but

the Chickasaw recognize the acceptance of literacy training as a necessary “survival tactic” for their people and the continuation of a nation.

Despite the achievements of Civil Rights and Self-Determination movements, mainstream educational systems continue to fail in educating children of color as illustrated by the consistency in high school dropouts and low retention and graduation rates among minority student populations. These patterns are particularly apparent in the educational achievement of American Indian students. The prevailing theme of literature dedicated to examining the experiences of American Indian college students demonstrates tribal culture is the most significant challenge for Natives in predominantly White institutions. This is due primarily to the fact that tribal culture is generally in complete contrast to the ideologies of the dominant culture, which governs mainstream educational systems. Tribal culture will often shape how American Indians interpret mainstream educational settings and their self-perceived value in these environments will often determine if they will remain at the institution.

Notwithstanding attempts of the colonial settlers to assimilate tribal nations to their Eurocentric ideologies and practices, Native people have managed to survive centuries of cultural eradication to retain and celebrate their tribal identity in this country. To gain a reasoned perspective and understanding of the importance of tribal culture to the success of American Indian college students, it is beneficial to evaluate how culture defines the persona of Native people and the manner in which their lives are governed by this multifaceted component of tribal living. Perhaps more important is to recognize how tribal culture shapes the experiences and decision-making of American Indians in

mainstream higher education. As Native people, the interconnected nature of our tribal culture touches every aspect of our lives. Therefore, any potential threat to that connectedness can result in the inner battles that may hinder Indian students in predominantly White colleges and universities where tribal culture is not valued.

To proceed to any level of understanding tribal culture, it is important to define the general concept of culture. Geertz (1973), among the more influential cultural anthropologists of the twentieth century, defined some of the governing principles in the study of culture today. Geertz is best known for his writings about the interpretation of culture but more specifically, the emphasis on “systems of learned and shared meaning” in the study of culture. His work in defining “culture” follows the earlier and seminal studies of Kluckhohn. Among the many interpretations of culture examined in Kluckhohn’s (1949) work, *Mirror of Man*, those most applicable to this examination of tribal culture are “a way of thinking, feeling, and believing, learned behavior, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group or the total way of life of a people” (pp. 23-26).

Geertz (1973) espoused a semiotic interpretation of culture following the beliefs of Max Weber. Geertz, one of the most influential scholars in the study of culture, famously wrote, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning” (p. 5). These concepts of culture will serve as the platform to identify relevant aspects of tribal culture, which may impact the experiences of American Indian college students in

mainstream educational systems. For Indigenous people, our “webs of significance” manifest in how we find meaning in the value of our tribal heritage and the interconnectedness of every component of our life. The history of anthropological work in indigenous communities is marred by erroneous hypotheses and propositions surrounding the position and value of culture to Native people. Geertz’s supposition of the interconnectivity of culture in the lives of Indigenous people is a valued anthropological perspective for application to this study of American Indian college students. This theoretical framework, which defines culture as “webs of significance,” strengthens the challenge to Tinto’s model that proposes students must disconnect from their former communities to successfully transition to the college environment. For many Native students this disconnect from their culture, as defined by familial and community bonds, is unfeasible because of this interconnectedness as suggested by Clifford Geertz.

Similarly, Clyde Kluckhohn is another pioneer in the anthropological studies of native culture. Near four decades of research in the Navaho culture positioned Kluckhohn to provide a considerable and most importantly accurate representation of tribal communities to the field of anthropology—a perspective that often escaped the work of anthropologists focused on their own erroneous interpretations of indigenous culture. Kluckhohn and Leighton (1962) discover this interconnected nature of the Navaho culture as suggested in the work of Clifford Geertz. The meticulous illustration of the various components of Navaho life and the manner in which The People align their position in the world with each aspect, indicates the value in acknowledging how interrupting this lifestyle may result in detriment to Native People. Some of these

components of tribal living are representative in their connection to the land, family and the value of religion in sustaining these viable aspects of the Indian community.

Interestingly, the Navaho premise that the mind and body is an interconnected whole that must be simultaneously examined in the healing process is a school of thought that has only entered mainstream medicine in the last few decades. Kluckhohn and Leighton (1962) assert, “The whole Navaho system of curing clearly take it for granted that you cannot treat a man’s ‘body’ without treating his ‘mind,’ and vice versa” (p. 309). One of the underlying themes in this study is the haphazard introduction of “White ways” into the Navaho culture and the manner in which this disrupts the harmony of the tribal community.

The authors suggest,

Instead of a patterned mosaic, Navaho culture is becoming an ugly patchwork of meaningless and totally unrelated pieces. Personal and social chaos are the byproducts. The lack of selective blending and constructive fusion between white and Navaho cultures is not due to low intelligence among The People. They are perfectly capable of learning white ways. But when the traits of another culture are learned externally and one by one without underlying values and premises of that culture, the learners feel uncomfortable. They sense the absence of the fitness of things, of a support which is none the less real because of difficult to verbalize.

For every way of life is a structure—not a haphazard collection of all the different physically possible and functionally effective patterns of belief and action but an interdependent system with all its patterns segregated and arranged in a manner which is *felt*, not *thought*, to be appropriate. (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1962, p. 320)

These “webs of significance” in the Navaho culture help The People to define meaning in life and as suggested when “White ways” are forced into these

interconnected components of the native culture, it results in losing that sense of meaning and how they view the world and their position in the world.

My cultural identity influences my interpretation of the experiences of American Indians in mainstream education because I share many of those experiences as well. There were numerous instances when I felt my tribal culture was not adequately represented in the college curriculum, particularly in general education, and on occasion not present at all. Despite the geographical location of UNC Pembroke in the heart of a Lumbee community, some non-Indian faculty and students devalue tribal culture. Many non-Indians cannot understand the disconnect this presents for Native students because mainstream educational systems are codified by and through Eurocentric culture. Since colonial settlement, our ancestors have fought assimilationist views that our culture warrants dismissal. Many Native people function with an ethos, which values the culture of other groups while expecting the same respect for our own. However, mainstream society operates within the mindset that to function properly in this country, groups must abandon their own cultural identity for that of the dominant culture.

Another challenge that I believe I share with other Indian students is the absence of adequate Native faculty representation in higher education. As I reflect on my experiences at UNC Pembroke, this is not the case because there were some American Indian faculty serving as mentors to Native students. However, during my doctoral studies at UNC Greensboro I have not met any American Indian faculty in the School of Education. There is a strong representation of minority faculty in the Cultural Foundations program, who value the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in their

teachings. Native faculty mentors who see higher education through my cultural lens are not present at UNC Greensboro. As a Native student, I value these relationships in the educational experience and my cultural identity provides the lens to view how the absence of American Indian mentors can also make Native students feel that sense of disconnect in mainstream institutions.

Horse (2005), a member of the Kiowa tribe, describes the personal sensibility of tribal culture that most often shapes the experiences of American Indian college students. This consciousness is molded by personal experiences, which develops the guiding principles that influence how American Indians perceive their position in mainstream higher education. The diversity of tribal culture presents a challenge for mainstream institutions. The tendency in campus culture most often is to generalize the experiences of all Native students as similar, if not identical. Consequently, generalizing tribal cultures breeds the marginalization of American Indians because of the cultural uniqueness of these students. These cultural conflicts are frequently the prevailing challenge American Indian college students experience in mainstream higher education.

Garrod and Larimore (1997) present the metaphorical depiction of Native students struggling to balance between two worlds as they attempt to function within the dominant culture while maintaining their contrasting tribal culture. For many American Indian students, deeply rooted in their tribal culture, this inner war must pose a constant distraction from all things academic in these university settings. Garrod and Larimore suggest that this may require some level of assimilation for Native students to be successful in mainstream institutions. The manner in which Native students will choose

to cope with this tendency toward assimilation may very often determine whether they decide to remain in college.

Mainstream institutions that are not supportive of tribal culture will tend to influence some Native students to transform their identity in order to navigate the discomfort of alienation. To serve this purpose, some American Indian students may abandon elements of their tribal culture until they return to their home community. As an American Indian college student, this has manifested in my discovery that mainstream society is not accepting of the Lumbee dialect. In an effort to escape ridicule, I am very conscious to avoid the use of my tribal dialect beyond the refuge of my home community—where people understand and accept me without question.

For some Native students, the act of blending into the dominant culture is less stressful than remaining on the defense of their tribal identity. As evidenced in the low retention and graduation rates of American Indian college students, the decision to abandon elements of their tribal culture to appease the expectations of the dominant society is indeed traumatic and a significant sacrifice—one many Native students are not willing to make. Additionally, the interconnectedness of our tribal culture inhibits entertaining this decision without consideration of the possible negative consequences.

Parallel to Geertz's notion of "webs of significance," Garrod and Larimore (1997) describe the cultural identity of American Indians as an "intricate web of interrelationships" (p. 3). These relationships include familial connections, the tribal community and even connectivity to their homeland. For American Indians, familial relationships are commonly defined beyond the traditional nuclear family of the

dominant culture. When Native students leave their tribal communities to attend mainstream institutions, the disconnection from these critical elements of their tribal identity may often result in measurable levels of separation anxiety. The elements of tribal identity, such as familial connectivity and cultural practices that foster meaning and support, are no longer easily or readily accessible. Detachment from these critical relationships is traumatic for Native students.

These relationships, which define the very core of Native students, are suddenly insignificant to their peers, professors and university administrators at predominantly White college campuses. The individualized culture of higher education does not foster the support existing within tribal communities. For the Native student, their very existence in the world is compromised by the absence of these sustaining relationships. Without question, distance is a critical factor that many mainstream institutions are not in a position to address. That does not alleviate their role in understanding the value of familial connectivity for their Native students and presenting opportunities for developing pseudo-family connections that may indeed provide some alternatives when frequent visits to their tribal communities are not realistic.

In twenty-first century America, a challenge exists as to what particular characteristics may define one's tribal culture. Some may contend the following characteristics are representative of tribal culture: speaking the native language, indigenous religious ceremonies, possession of a buckskin attire and moccasins, residing on a reservation and even maintaining the practices of hunters and gatherers for sustainability. Others may attest that tribal identity exists within the context of the

physical characteristics of the individual (i.e. brown skin; black, straight hair; defined cheek bones; and dark-colored eyes). Upon examining the stereotypical imagery of tribal culture, one would discover American Indians live within a complex, self-defined existence with variations as numerous as the hundreds of tribes living in North America and the intertribal variety that exists.

Consequently, many Native students at predominantly White institutions must contend with prejudice and challenges to their identity when they do not fit these stereotypical images held by some of their peers. Without question, a great number of Native students remain in a constant state of defending their existence to non-Indian students and faculty. This cultural war exists because the Native student fails to identify with the stereotypes of tribal identity perpetuated by the dominant society. When the campus administration fosters a culture of valuing diversity, students of color are less likely to contend with such instances of discrimination. This discrimination frequently results in alienation and, sadly, leaving the institution.

The formative years of many American Indian students are shaped by a system of tribal rituals that define their cultural identity. Gilliard and Moore (2007) share the value of honoring such tribal rituals in early learning programs for American Indian children. For example, powwows are a common custom to most tribal communities. Rituals to honor the dead, celebratory feasts, religious ceremonies and other seasonal events give meaning to the cultural identity of many Native students. Life at mainstream institutions separates American Indian students from many of these aspects of their tribal culture.

This disconnect from their tribal community impedes any sense of belonging and further exacerbates feelings of alienation, which hinders their chances of succeeding in mainstream higher education.

Today, many religious groups enjoy the sense of value for the preservation of their rituals and customs. The same respect should be afforded for American Indian rituals and customs. The dominant society has transformed to a heightened awareness that challenging the value of religious rituals and customs represents discrimination and will not be tolerated. Mainstream colleges and universities should exercise the same value for tribal rituals and customs. Very few predominantly White institutions are afforded the benefit of being positioned in a tribal community; this does not eliminate their responsibility to honor the cultural traditions and rituals of their Native students.

One of the hallmarks of post-secondary education is classroom discussion, which is designed in a manner completely contrary to tribal teachings. The expectation of college settings is that students will engage in a communal educational experience as they discuss and even debate their ideas/opinions with their peers. Such an individualistic approach to learning is completely contrary to many tribal cultures. A case in point is that the Navajo believe this individualistic approach to learning, while calling attention to oneself in the classroom setting, is inappropriate behavior (Garrod & Larimore, 1997). This competitive behavior perpetuated in university classrooms is contrary to tribal culture because it fosters behavior that is self-centered, aggressive and works against the group efforts.

The drawback for Native students in this area is that their lack of class participation is often interpreted as a reflection of their level of knowledge and the extent to which they are engaged in the learning environment. These misconceptions held by the dominant society are based upon the lack of knowledge in tribal cultures.

Lumbee Indian students tend to experience similar struggles in mainstream classroom settings. In recent interviews with five Lumbee faculty, two of the interviewees shared similar stories of their inhibitions to engage in mainstream classroom group discussions. Drs. Malinda M. Lowery and Alfred Bryant believe the Lumbee way of rearing of children is that children should keep quiet. This conflicts with the ethos of mainstream educational settings. Dr. Lowery recognizes that her grades in classroom participation were a representation of the conflict between her tribal identity and the expectations of mainstream society (M. M. Lowery, personal communication, May 10, 2010). Dr. Bryant discusses graduate school experiences when the professors would not recognize his raised hand to engage in the classroom discussion (A. Bryant, personal communication, May 11, 2010). Similarly, my experiences in mainstream educational settings are also defined by my own tribal culture. The dominant culture holds an ethos that is most often contrary to that of American Indian culture. The challenge for the Indigenous student is that tribal culture is so interwoven throughout every aspect of our lives that efforts to modify or abandon any component of our Native identity result in inner conflict.

It is important to recognize that not all tribes share the same experiences. Fowler (1987), in a six-year study of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Indian nations of northern Montana, describes the competitive nature of the Gros Ventre Tribe. Their drive to succeed extended beyond quests for prominence among fellow tribal members rivalry with other tribes. Gros Ventres equate their success with this competitive disposition. Fowler shares observations from various tribal members across generational lines that represent the competitive ethos of the Gros Ventres. “In the words of one elderly man, ‘Gros Ventres are known for not taking a back seat to anyone’” (p. 117). Like many American Indian tribes, Gros Ventres recognized the value of education in competing with the whites. “A young man put it this way: ‘We feel it is important to live up to white standards as to succeed—not to believe or act like them, but achieve like them’” (p. 118). There are characteristics that tribes share but Gros Ventres are one example of the variations that exist among tribal nations.

Fowler (1987) examines the transformation that some tribes experienced to adapt to the cultural and environmental changes in and around their reservation. Despite these cultural changes, many tribes hold to the value of their tribal identity and change does not compromise that position. Fowler describes the variations that exist among different tribes and among tribal members in interpretation of culture. “An array of symbols—political, ritual, sacred—have meaning and emotional impact for all, yet people disagree over the interpretation of these symbols” (p. 2).

The powwow is a symbol of tribal culture for many Indian nations but the interpretation and value may be different from one tribe to another and among tribal

members. For example, there are members of the Lumbee Tribe who are very active in the powwow circuit but this symbol of tribal culture has not been valued in my family—most of us do not own regalia. The contested meanings of “traditional” Indian culture are often the bedrock for conflict among Native people. One would challenge the degree of “Indianness” based on their interpretation of tribal culture. Such is true for the Lumbee Tribe. Our lack of a tribal language and our history of Christian values cause some to believe we exhibit characteristics indicative of “White” culture. It is common for American Indian students to experience challenges to their tribal identity at the hand of other Natives because they may not fit their interpretations of tribal culture.

Huffman (2008) introduces another misconception that American Indian students must contend with in mainstream higher education. The relationship between educational achievement and self-esteem is one of the topics at the forefront of social psychological research. Without question, the consensus is that a relationship exists between poor educational attainment and self-esteem, but to generalize that such a relationship is more prevalent among American Indian students is yet to be proven. Sanders (1987) suggests, “Low self-esteem, directly related to group identity, is the major cause of the low achievement records of American Indian students” (p. 82). Her notion is that cultural conflict between American Indians and the dominant society is the driver for these feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. It is important to recognize that familial obligations, poverty, and inadequate academic preparation are among other reasons for low academic achievement among Native populations.

One could argue that this claim is yet another stereotype that should not be generalized to all American Indian students but instead masks the real issue—mainstream educational systems attempt to instruct students with a “one size fits all” methodology, which most often marginalizes not only Native students but all minorities. “Monolithic ways of viewing groups fail to recognize differences among groups and are limited by a belief that individuals from certain ethnic, gender, sexual preference, or economic class groups hold identical or even similar views, ideas, or behaviors” (Brayboy, 2000, p. 423). A body of research exists that attributes the challenges of American Indian students not to their perceived inadequacies but to failure of mainstream education to provide culturally relevant learning environments (Lundberg, 2007; Martin, 2005; Reyner & Eder, 2004). For centuries, mainstream educational systems have refused to properly acknowledge the value of preserving tribal culture in the education of Native youth.

Huffman (1999) guides efforts to understand the experiences and issues faced by American Indians in higher education with an overarching theme—mainstream educators must first acknowledge the cultural diversity of American Indian college students. The more than five hundred tribes in North America each exhibit unique cultural traits shaped by tribal history and socioeconomic status. Additionally, within each tribal nation are cultural distinctions by clan and even further differentiation among individual tribal members. So, to entertain the notion that all American Indian college students share the same experiences and challenges in mainstream higher education is presumptuous and inaccurate (Huffman, 1999, p. 143).

Consequently, one can construct some generalized assumptions to develop a basic understanding of how Native students navigate mainstream academic settings. As an American Indian woman in higher education, I can attest to some of these challenges in predominantly White institutions. My undergraduate and graduate experiences are unique to most other American Indian college students; in that, I attended a predominantly White institution in a Native community where I could maintain familial connections in my own tribal community. My experiences in higher education serve as a frame of reference to define these challenges to tribal culture and introduce recommendations to address these issues on mainstream campuses.

An important caveat relevant to this discussion is that most Native students attend schools where the distance from their tribal community impedes their ability to maintain the strong connections to their tribal cultures. As evidenced in the retention and graduation rates of Native students at UNC Pembroke, all American Indian students at predominantly White institutions do not experience the same challenges. In fact, in a study of the Native students at UNC Pembroke conducted Spring 2010, more than 90 percent of the participants were Lumbees from the local tribal community. A significant conclusion from this study was that the location of the institution in a tribal community was a contributing factor to the success of Native students at UNCP as evidenced by retention and graduation rates above those of national rates of other American Indian college students.

Predominantly White colleges and universities must examine their programs, policies, and personnel for addressing the needs of Native students. Despite the gains in

minority enrollments in U.S. colleges over the past 30 years, American Indian students continue to experience challenges in mainstream higher education. Many institutions assume that by addressing the general needs of minority students on their campus they encompass the needs of Native students. Aligning the needs of all minority students under the umbrella of diversity or multiculturalism invalidates the heritage of Native students and all other ethnic groups as well. I challenge these campuses to move from the generalized ideology that “one program fits all” and focus on the specific needs of the students at their own institution.

As an American Indian woman working and teaching in higher education, I see value in educating non-Native students, faculty and staff in the fallacies of many of the stereotypes that serve as their frame of reference for identifying tribal culture.

Mainstream institutions should celebrate the value of tribal culture by incorporating American Indian guests in their Distinguished Speakers Series. The campus administration must take the lead in fostering an atmosphere that values tribal culture through their support of such events to educate the campus community in American Indian culture that is not grounded in stereotypical inaccuracies.

Mainstream campuses should thoughtfully evaluate the potential benefit of programs to address the separation anxiety many Native students experience as a result of leaving their tribal communities. Institutions should solicit host families from the local community who will agree to invite a Native student in their home for weekly meals and other opportunities to foster pseudo-familial relationships to support and nurture the student during their time away from their tribal community. It is important for

mainstream institutions to recognize the value of support mechanisms to promoting a positive experience for American Indian students.

Even though mainstream campuses frequently espouse their commitment to multiculturalism, many American Indian students are marginalized by the generalized ideologies that seek to apply “one size fits all” programs to address diversity mandates. Faculty development programs should be required to educate non-Native faculty in the value of honoring tribal culture. Even though I challenge the stereotypical assumption that American Indian students have a distinct learning style that impedes their ability to learn in mainstream education, I agree that Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy should be modified for instructing American Indian students. Faculty at predominantly White institutions should be “schooled” in how the absence of honor to tribal cultures in mainstream educational settings has in fact hindered the educational attainment of many Native students.

As I reflect on my experiences in higher education, it is apparent to me that Native students must navigate between two worlds to be successful in the academy. To be successful in mainstream higher education, I must abandon my traditional Lumbee dialect and speak “proper” English as defined by the dominant culture. When I am with my People, I am conscious not to “act White” by abandoning the use of our tribal dialect. During my employment at UNC Pembroke, I have discovered that non-Indian colleagues and professors, particularly those from areas outside of Robeson County, will apply the stereotypical supposition of ignorance when they hear someone speaking with our tribal dialect. What they do not realize is that the words that come from my mouth are by no

means an indication of my level of intelligence. The manner in which the dominant society gauges intelligence marginalizes anyone who does not fit the stereotypical representation of intelligence as defined by mainstream society. Native students struggle with the decision of whether they want to take on this bicultural façade to be accepted into the dominant culture. Many of us resent that we must change who we are to progress in mainstream educational systems. Some refuse to “play the game” to appease the dominant culture.

My experiences in mainstream higher education serve as the driving force for a multi-faceted decision to remain in the field of higher education. I realized that I must persist through the barriers established by the dominant culture to achieve my goal to degree attainment if I am to be of any service to my People. As a lecturer, I share my experiences with other Native students and encourage the value in learning to function between these two worlds—the tribal community and mainstream society. Eddie Box, Southern Ute, said, “The battle for Indian children will be won in the classroom, not on the streets or on horses. The students of today are our warriors of tomorrow.”

For centuries, the education of American Indian youth has been predicated on the notion that tribal culture cannot exist simultaneously in academia. The struggle to maintain tribal identity while navigating mainstream educational systems has been the bedrock of controversy in American Indian education since colonial settlement. These “webs of significance” that we identify as our tribal culture are not easily detached, as the dominant culture would believe. Native students must learn to navigate the obstacles of the dominant culture to achieve success in this society as defined by the White man while

simultaneously holding steadfast to the tribal culture, which defines their very existence. I do not see this as a compromise to our teachings—it is simply a matter of shifting roles to achieve a goal.

Interest in the Study

Personal and Professional

The strong commitment to my People and the preservation of our tribal community drives my desire to dedicate my research agenda to topics in the field of American Indian higher education. In my lifetime, I have witnessed the economic disparities in my community that are not representative of the poverty many experience as a result of a simple economic recession. Without question, I believe education is the socioeconomic driver to move my impoverished tribal community to a position of self-sufficiency. Research and scholarship in the field of American Indian education is necessary for improving the educational attainment of Native people.

As a first-generation college graduate, I acknowledge the value of establishing a legacy of educational attainment for my children and generations beyond. It is imperative that my children and other Native youth understand that despite the challenges and oppressions of mainstream society, American Indian people can and do achieve their educational and vocational goals with hard work and persistence. I view this project as an obligation not only to my children, my family but to my tribal community as well. As an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe, I am obligated to do whatever I can to make a significant and positive impact for my People.

There are members of my extended family who graduated from college to pursue careers in secondary education. I believe this path to a doctorate will position me to make a difference for my People on another level—to positively impact the struggles American Indians experience in mainstream higher education. Educating young children is a valuable position for improving the status of Native people. I believe a scholarly career with writing and publishing in indigenous educational research, will position me for equally vital change but in a different venue from secondary educators.

As a Native scholar and researcher, it is my responsibility to collect and disseminate indigenous knowledge to transform the landscape of contemporary education for the improvement of educational attainment in Indian Country. As a product of mainstream higher education, the challenges to degree attainment are not only those expressed as experiences of college students recorded and reported in the literature—they comprise much of my experiences as well. I believe my “insider” perspective of this topic is important and useful in the validation of my research.

The limited number of American Indian scholars directly impacts the amount of research in the field of indigenous educational research. If there are to be substantive changes in this field of study, Native scholars must commit their research agenda to expanding this body of literature. My personal and professional obligation to dedicating my research to issues in the field of American Indian education represents the holistic nature of tribal culture and how it impacts every aspect of our lives. The interwoven nature of my tribal culture and values reflect the decision-making that bridges a path between my personal commitments and my professional career.

Research Interest and Problem

As previously discussed, many American Indian college students experience barriers to access and success of a college degree in mainstream institutions. Datasets on Native educational attainment from national organizations such as Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) and National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) frequently illustrate their low retention and graduation rates at predominantly White universities. Quite often, these rates are among the lowest of all ethnic and/or racial groups. However, the retention and graduation rates of the American Indian students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) are not indicative of the national trends found in the scholarship in this area of discussion. It is my theory that the college experiences of American Indian students at UNCP are distinct from other Native students who attend predominantly White colleges and universities. I proposed a study to examine the experiences of American Indian college students at UNC Pembroke. A plethora of studies examining college departure apply the theories of Vincent Tinto. In this aspect, I followed the trend of other studies examining college departure to gauge the applicability of Tinto's interactionalist's theory to American Indian students.

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke was established in 1887 as a teacher training school for American Indians. Today, American Indians represent less than 20 percent of its student population. Since Native students at UNC Pembroke are not considered among the traditionally low-performing (academically or retention/graduation rates) groups, examining the factors that contribute to their success on a predominantly

White university campus may aid other mainstream colleges and universities in addressing the challenges that are believed to impede degree attainment of their Native student populations.

A fairly recent trend in mainstream higher education is develop and implement programs and services that attempt to foster a culture of diversity on predominantly White college campuses. It is probable that the efforts to do so may in effect, marginalize the differences that exist among diverse Native cultures; thereby, maintaining a level of systematic acculturation that continues to perpetuate the underrepresentation of American Indians in higher education. Is it likely that many of these challenges for American Indian college students persist because mainstream higher education generalizes, and thus downplays, the experiences of all Native students?

Profile of Native Students at UNCP

Research in the field of American Indian higher education may often generalize the challenges that many Native students face. “The experiences of Native American students in higher education are vast and varied, as are the tribal cultures, traditions, languages, and beliefs of the 562 Indian nations in the United States” (Lowe, 2005, p. 33). There are no published studies that compare the experiences of Native students at UNCP with other Indian students in mainstream institutions. American Indians represent the third largest minority group on the UNC Pembroke campus. This provides UNCP with the distinction of being a “Native American Serving Institution.”

American Indian students attending The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) contradict the commonly held belief and generality that Native

students struggle to succeed at predominantly White institutions. An examination of ten years of cohort retention data at UNC Pembroke indicate that the overall retention rate, 4-year graduation and 6-year graduation rates of American Indian students exceed the rates of Caucasian students (UNCP, 2009). Furthermore, they also exceed the rates of their Native peers attending colleges and universities nationally. In the University of North Carolina university system, retention rates are defined as first-year, full-time, degree-seeking freshman that matriculate in the fall semester and stay enrolled through the next fall.

Many institutions of higher education utilize retention and graduation data from the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) at The University of Oklahoma for national trend comparisons. This consortium of two-year and four-year institutions is known for annual reports on retention and graduation comprehensive benchmarks not available from any other source. As a member of the consortium, UNCP receives the annual comprehensive benchmark report and a personalized report comparing our students to up to 20 institutional peers in the CSRDE participant group. In addition to these comprehensive reports, CRSDE hosts a series of monthly webinars for consortium members to remain abreast of current issues relating to student retention and success.

From a national perspective for the 2008-2009 academic year, the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) data illustrated that the overall retention rates for American Indian students (77.1 percent) at UNCP exceeded those of Caucasian students (64.6 percent) and African American student (75.8 percent). For a comparison to

the national trends, the retention rates of American Indian students at UNCP were more than 8 percentage points above other Native students in the group categorized as “All” institutions (68.9 percent) in the study and those institutions specified as “Public” (68.8 percent) such as UNCP. Consistent with the national trend for the retention rates of American Indians compared to their Caucasian counterparts, the Native students at UNCP are slightly lower than those of White students (80.4 percent) in both institutional designations (“All” and “Public”) in this particular study. African American students are retained at a rate slightly higher (average 75.2 percent) than American Indians in “All” and “Public” institutional categories (CSRDE, 2009).

The 4-year (17.2 percent) and 6-year (36.3 percent) graduation rates for Native students at UNC Pembroke are slightly above the 4-year (16.6 percent) and 6-year (36.3 percent) rates of their Caucasian counterparts. Comparatively, the national 4-year graduation rates for American Indians students in the “Public” category (17.3 percent) and the “All Institutions” (17.9 percent) category are near half (35.8 percent for “All” and 34.6 percent for “Public”) the graduation rates of their Caucasian counterparts. The 6-year graduation rates for Native students are near 20 points below (39 percent for “All” and 38.7 percent for “Public”) the rates of Caucasian students, which average 60 percent for these institutional categories. Graduation rates (4-year and 6-year) for African American students are higher than American Indian students in all categories except the 4-year retention rates for African Americans is lower than American Indians on the UNCP campus. Otherwise, the information is consistent with the national trend that Natives are graduating from college at rates lower than their peers (CSRDE, 2009).

NSSE Special Analysis

The National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a self-supporting auxiliary unit within the Center for Postsecondary Research (CPR) in the Indiana University School of Education. *The College Student Report* is one of many studies conducted by CPR. The survey items reflect the behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with “best practices” in the undergraduate college experience. The goal of NSSE is not to directly assess student-learning outcomes but to define areas for improvement in the undergraduate experience. The Pew Charitable Trusts funded the NSSE pilot in 2000 to gather data on collegiate quality. Hundreds of four-year colleges and universities participate in the NSSE annually to assess student participation in programs and activities on their college campuses (NSSE, 2010).

The NSSE instrument was designed by experts and extensively tested to ensure validity and reliability as well as to minimize non-response bias and mode effects. The institutional response rate for 2010 for paper and web-based versions of NSSE ranged from 33 to 38 percent (NSSE, 2010). An institution will administer a cycle of NSSE to a group of students that consists of first-year students and seniors. The assumption is that at graduation, the student would have participated in the NSSE during the year of entry to the institution and during their senior year.

This special analysis compares American Indian students at the public institutions to Black, Caucasian and a combined group of non-AI students at the same public participant institutions. These data underscore the importance of student engagement and to guide institutional improvement efforts. To facilitate educational improvement

initiatives, NSSE created five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment (NSSE, 2009). A benchmark comparisons report will compare the performance of UNC Pembroke with AI peers nationally. In addition, two other comparisons between UNC Pembroke and (a) above-average institutions with benchmarks in the top 50% of all NSSE institutions and (b) high-performing institutions with benchmarks in the top 10% of all NSSE institutions. These displays permit further analysis to determine if the engagement of UNC Pembroke American Indian students differs in a statistically significant, meaningful ways from the average student in the comparison groups. They also provide more insight into how the student experience varies on the UNCP campus and in comparison groups.

Validity and reliability of NSSE data. The following information is provided by NSSE (2009) to facilitate discussions of NSSE data on college campuses. The validity of self-reported data can be affected by the ability of respondents to provide accurate and truthful information in response to a question. As reflected in the research, respondents tend to respond accurately on questions about their past behavior unless the nature of the questions stir some level of discomfort. Items on the NSSE survey address specific timeframes to assist respondents with the recall of the events in question.

NSSE was designed to satisfy the following conditions for ensuring the validity of self-reported data:

1. information requested is known to respondents
2. questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously
3. questions refer to recent activities

4. respondents take questions seriously
5. questions do not threaten, embarrass, or violate respondents' privacy (NSSE, 2009, p. 2)

The 'halo effect,' where some students may inflate performance, grades, or personal gains and efforts, appears to be fairly consistent across student populations. Thus, although what students report may differ somewhat from what they actually do, the effect does not appear to advantage or disadvantage one institution or student group compared with another. (NSSE, 2009, pp. 2-3)

Potential design flaws of NSSE. A significant design flaw in utilizing NSSE data as the quantitative component for this study is the expectation that the students are involved in a cycle that will include their participation as a first-year student and then again in their senior year. This dataset is also problematic because this benchmark grand analysis does not include demographic questions to identify age, gender, tribal affiliation and geographical location of the survey participants. These components are indeed important for a thorough examination of the experiences of Native college students. However, this national dataset can serve to examine the engagement patterns of American Indian students at UNC Pembroke with other Native students across the country and a comparison of engagement patterns between Native students and other ethnic groups.

Why Study Native College Students?

As external pressure on higher education has redirected the recent focus from increased enrollment to analysis and discussion of retention and graduation rates, colleges and universities must reexamine those factors that impact, positively and negatively, the success rates of traditionally low-performing groups. This is particularly relevant for American Indian students. While American Indian students at UNC Pembroke are not

considered among the traditionally low-performing groups, examining the factors that contribute to their success may aid other mainstream colleges and universities in addressing the challenges that impede academic success and degree attainment of their Native student populations.

Studies, examining the experiences of American Indian college students in mainstream higher education, tend to focus on those students who attend predominantly White colleges and universities where it is difficult to sustain a comfortable level of connectivity to their tribal culture. The void in American Indian higher education literature is that there appear to be no significant studies that examine the experiences of American Indian students at predominantly White college campuses geographically positioned in tribal communities. This study to examine the experiences of Native students at UNC Pembroke will represent an effort to address this gap in the literature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION

Key Concepts and Terms

The outline chosen for this literature review will first introduce some of the key terms used in discussions in the area of college student retention. This section will be followed by a historical overview of retention and how perceptions of retention and the associated challenges have transformed over time. After this chronological overview of retention, I will present the foremost theory developed as a result of the studies to examine and account for the reasons why college students do not persist to degree completion. The goal of this literature review is to present the landscape of scholarship in the field of college student retention and the theories that suggest reasons why students do not persist. All of which to lay the foundation for presenting the model of American Indian students at UNC Pembroke who contradict these theories of higher education persistence.

A review of literature in the field of higher education persistence should begin with a cursory examination of the key terminology used in these discussions. This section will serve to educate laypersons unfamiliar with higher education jargon relating to retention and persistence. A plethora of scholars and researchers have developed terms to describe the various aspects of student departure. Berger and Lyon (2005) introduce the

following compilation of key concepts to describe this phenomenon as a precursor to their extensive historical account of retention:

- Attrition—refers to students who fail to reenroll at an institution in consecutive semesters.
- Dismissal—refers to a student who is not permitted by the institution to continue enrollment.
- Dropout—refers to a student whose initial educational goal was to complete at least a bachelor's degree but who did not complete it.
- Mortality—refers to the failure of students to remain in college until graduation.
- Persistence—refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.
- Retention—refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation.
- Stopout—refers to a student who temporarily withdraws from an institution or system.
- Withdrawal—refers to the departure of a student from a college or university campus (p. 7).

Berger and Lyon (2005) challenge those discussing issue of student departure to recognize the dichotomies associated with these key concepts. For example, there are distinguishable differences between the terms that are *voluntary*, decisions made by the student, and *involuntary*, when the institution does not permit reenrollment. The authors caution against generalized assumptions without the consideration of some of the following contextual issues: “student trends, diversity of campuses, educational roles, socioeconomic external contexts, policies and interventions, and bases of knowledge” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 8).

Braxton and Hirschy (2005) examine student departure within the context of research conducted in commuter colleges and universities. The demographics of such a

student population would mirror those at UNC Pembroke which include a fusion of students 18-24 years of age residing with their parents, students with dependent children, many with employment obligations, and of course, part-time and full-time enrollments.

[C]ommuter students typically hold their primary social memberships with family, friends, and colleagues off campus. As a result, the influences of the campus and external environments in commuter colleges and universities differ from those of residential institutions. (p. 74)

On the contrary, the focus for students attending residential institutions is much more directed to the internal campus environment and the associated components (e.g. relationships and activities).

This focus of student departure examines the following fundamental elements that may contribute to the decision to persist or exit the university setting: student entry characteristics, external environment, and the student's academic integration to the university campus (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). The authors suggest that students enroll with a plethora of pre-existing traits that influence their decision to persist. "For example, students who value the purpose of attending college and feel dedicated to attain a degree show signs of motivation, which increases their likelihood of persisting" (p. 74). Some of these student characteristics include but are not limited to familial background, pre-college preparedness, and academic ability.

Braxton and Hirschy (2005) assert that since students at commuter colleges and universities balance multiple obligations external to the campus, these external factors may certainly contribute to the events of student departure. The authors suggest that these external influences may function two-fold for commuter students based on the nature of

the factor. For example, external factors which serve to support the student's pursuit of a college degree will, thus, contribute to their decision to persist to degree completion.

Braxton and Hirschy (2005) explain the possible results with negative external influences:

Students with high levels of personal empathy tend to be sensitive to how their actions affect others. Therefore, individuals who perceive that their student roles create hardship for their families (e.g. financial stress or limited time spent at home) are less likely to continue in school. (pp. 74-76)

If students receive encouragement from family, friends and members of their community, they are more likely to persist to degree attainment.

The authors discuss the internal campus environment and the factors that may impact the commuter student to persist. The high-paced nature of college campuses may influence the departure decision if students experience anxiety associated with the "confusing and chaotic" nature of the campus environment (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, p. 76). Thus, the student's level of self-efficacy may impact their decision to persist on the commuter campus. Also, the level of engagement of the campus will impact the student's institutional commitment and ultimately, their decision to remain enrolled and continue to graduation. Commitments, external to the campus environment, may contribute to the student's commitment to the institutional. The necessary commitment to family, for example, may limit the student involvement on the campus and thus, impact the extent to which the student may become engaged on the university campus. Student Affairs administrators and staff are challenged to develop programs to address the distinct needs of commuter students which often impact the departure decision.

Silverman, Aliabadi, and Stiles (2009) discuss the challenges to academics of commuter, part-time, transfer, and returning (CPTR) students. The notion is that CPTR students are historically underserved when compared with more traditional 18-24 year old because of the extent of their external obligations resulting on limited time engaged on the college campus. “Colleges and universities have historically failed to recognize the frustrations, anxieties, and challenges of commuting to campus, being enrolled part-time, transferring from another institutions, or returning to school after a long hiatus” (p. 225). The authors challenge institutions to develop strategies to ensure CPTR students are well-informed of opportunities to be engaged on the college campus outside classroom instruction and to develop the skills necessary to prioritize and balance the multiple life roles that many struggle to balance.

History of the Studies in Student Retention

Antecedents of higher education were indicative of a focus on enrollments more than persistence to degree attainment. Changes in the landscape of employment opportunities yielded a greater value on a college education. This transformation in higher education represented a paradigm shift to institutional concern with varying rates of attrition. John McNeely (1938), commissioned by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Office of Education, published one of the first studies on student departure issues in 1938. McNeely’s extensive study, “College Student Mortality,” examined different rates of attrition, the impact of institutional size, average timeframes for degree completion, and points at which attrition was most common. Additional factors focused on characteristics of the student such as age at admission, gender, locale from family,

employment responsibilities, social and extracurricular activities and the variations for leaving school (whether voluntary or involuntary). McNeely's work in student attrition is considered pioneering and groundbreaking for comprehensive studies in this area for decades to come.

The era surrounding the Civil Rights Movement introduced a more diverse student body to colleges and universities. Retention of minority college student became a significant issue germane to mainstream higher education because in many cases students of color were often not academically prepared at the level of their Caucasian peers and this time period in U.S. higher education was assuredly not prepared to provide culturally relevant environments in these educational settings established by and centered on Eurocentric ideologies. More than one half century later and despite rhetoric focused on diversity; multiculturalism; and inclusiveness, minority college students tend to have among the lowest retention rates at mainstream colleges and universities (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

With the growing need to focus on ascertaining factors that may impact the retention of college students, more campuses moved toward a systematic psychological approach to examining trends in attrition, which focused on student character inadequacies (e.g. lack of academic preparedness and personal motivation). Spady (1970) developed the first theoretical model of the student dropout process based on Emile Durkheim's theory of suicide behavior. This model incorporated student background characteristics with key aspects of the institutional environment in an attempt to develop an empirical knowledge base to increase the attrition rates of undergraduate students. In

Durkheim's study, alignment with the values and norms of the group and support from friends and others were designated as indirect factors influencing withdrawal.

This introduced the idea that such factors may be associated with social integration leading to satisfaction which sequentially increased institutional commitment—a significant determinant of student attrition (Bean, 1982). Spady (1970) theorized that social integration to the campus environment would likely result in student persistence. The correlation to suicide in Spady's study was that similar to incidents of student departure, those who are not well-integrated into the social structure (e.g. campus environment) are less likely to survive the college experience (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

Berger and Lyon (2005) cite the following three reasons for the notoriety of Spady's model:

1. The first attempt to synthesize existing empirical work into a cohesive conceptual framework.
2. Spady's sociology-based model, presenting the correlation between the student and the college environment, challenges prior models grounded in psychology.
3. Served as the forerunner for Tinto's model which is foremost model referenced in retention discussions. (p. 18)

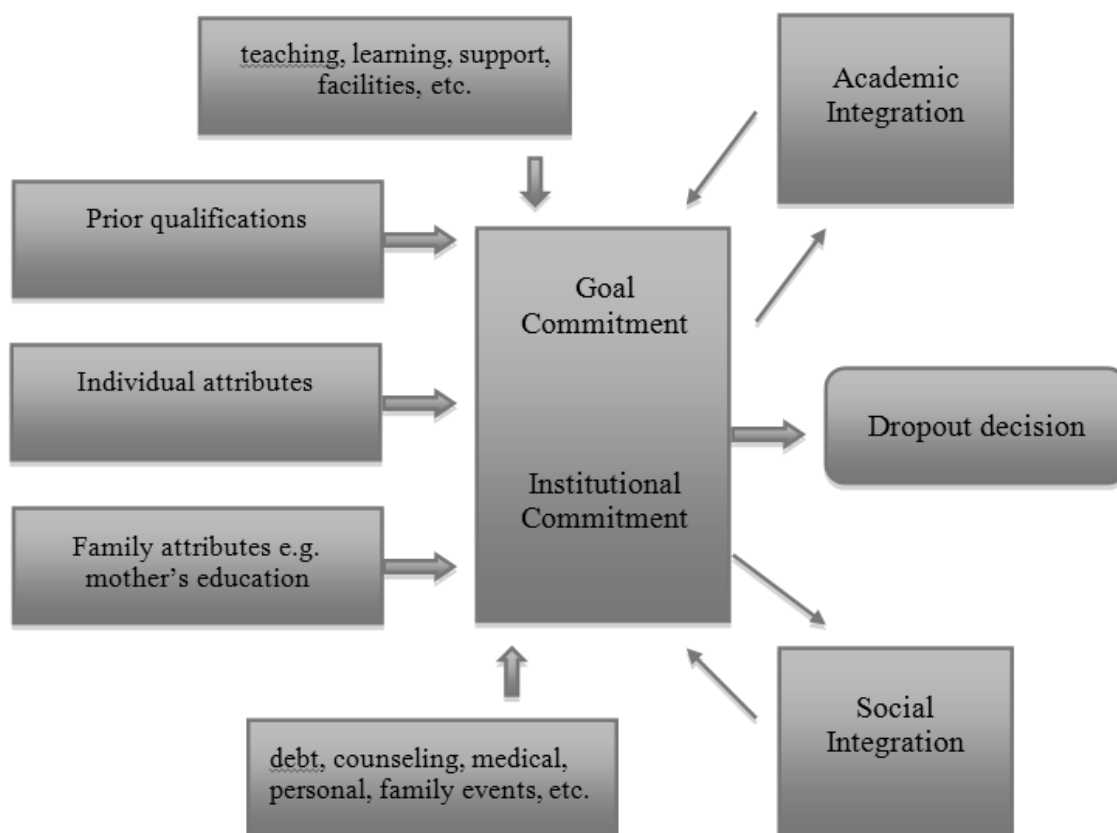
Spady (1970) suggested that persistence was likely to occur when the attributes of the student became aligned with the institutional norms and values. This idea aligns with the historical ideologies of mainstream educational systems, which argue that in order for students to be successful, they must assimilate to the values and norms of the system.

Tinto's Theory

Vincent Tinto (1975), building on Spady's theories of student departure, developed the interactionalist's theory—the most frequently referenced theory relating to student departure. Tinto argues that a direct correlation exists between engagement (i.e. academic and social integration) and persistence. Huffman (2010) introduces the following list of identifiers for Tinto's renowned theory on student departure: 'student integration theory' (Nora, 2001), 'institutional departure theory' (Pavel & Padilla, 1993), 'voluntary student departure theory' (Hurtado, 2007), and most commonly known as 'Tinto's theory' (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993). The lack of theoretical formulations accounting for student departure in higher education was the precursor for Tinto's groundbreaking work in this area. Scholars credit Tinto's interactionalist's theory with “near paradigmatic stature” in the field of college student retention research (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Braxton, 2000; Huffman, 2010).

Tinto (1975) suggests that students enter college with a number of individual characteristics that impact student departure in higher education. These individual characteristics include familial background factors such as socioeconomic status, educational level of the parents and parental expectations (e.g. the extent to which parents value a college degree). Race, gender and academic ability are individual attributes which impact the college student departure process. Another characteristic cited to impact the student departure process is the precollege experiences of the student (e.g. secondary and high school academic achievement). Tinto's hypothesis was that these factors would directly impact the decision to persist to degree attainment or to leave the institution

before graduation. These factors impact the degree of the student's integration into the academic and social systems of in the institution.



Adapted from Tinto (1975).

Figure 2. Vincent Tinto's Interactionalist's Model

Academic integration is defined by structural and normative dimensions (Tinto, 1975). Tinto defines structural integration as the meeting of explicit standards of the institution while normative integration represents the manner in which the student identifies with the normative structure of the academic component of the college experience. This is manifested in the intellectual development of the student. Social

integration is defined as the degree of connectivity between the student and the social systems represented on the college campus. Tinto defines these as informal peer groups, extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty, staff, and university administration. It is suggested that the value of these relationships may directly impact college student retention.

Tinto's interactionalist's theory suggests that academic and social integration directly impact the development of the student's commitment to their school and subsequently to degree completion. However, the caveat to this theory is that goal commitment is more influential to student persistence than commitment to the institution. "Sufficiently high goal commitment may lead to persistence in the institution even when little commitment to the institution is present. The phenomenon of 'sticking it out' may be just such a case" (p. 110).

A number of researchers tested variations of thirteen propositions generated from Tinto's model (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Braxton et al., 1997; Pascarella & Terenzizi, 1983; Tinto, 2006-2007). These combinations were dependent on factors such as ethnic background, gender, and institutional characteristics. The proposition that social integration leads to institutional commitment and a positive correlation with college persistence received notable support among the thirteen tested (Braxton et al., 2004). The lack of empirical internal consistency is a consistent challenge to Tinto's model (Braxton, 2000). As researchers conduct studies incorporating variations of Tinto's model, the ongoing research in the field of student retention redefines and enhances the body of knowledge available to colleges and universities.

Tinto's (1993, 1988) notion of transitioning between communities is built upon the work of Dutch anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep, who studied rites of passage in tribal communities. The correlation envisioned represented the movement of students from the membership of one group to that of another as commonly recognized in the ascent of youth to adult status in society. Van Gennep (1960) suggested this transition is signified by three distinct phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. These rites of passage were believed to adequately prepare youth for their role in taking over the responsibilities of the older generation. Tinto believes the rites of passage model serves as the appropriate frame of reference for depicting college student experiences:

The point of our referring to the work of van Gennep is not that the college student career is always clearly marked by ceremonies and symbolic rites of passage . . . Rather our interest in the concept of rites of passage is that it provides us with a way of thinking about the longitudinal process of student persistence in college and, by extension, about the time-dependent process of student departure. (Tinto, 1993, p. 94)

Tinto cautions the oversimplification of this “complex and fluid” (pp. 94-95) phenomena of student departure. The lines distinguishing the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation may always not be clearly visible. Additionally, it is possible that students may not experience all three phases.

In the first stage of the college career, Tinto (1993) suggest that the individual must disconnect from past communities such as family connections, local high school association, and community of residence. The idea is that the values and norms of these past communities are in conflict with those of the institution and should be alleviated for the student's assimilation/acculturation to the new community—the college environment.

The college student must encounter some level of transformation in the process of abandoning the norms and values of past communities for those of the campus community. “In order to become fully incorporated into the life of the college, they have to physically as well as socially disassociate themselves from the communities of the past” (p. 96).

Tinto (1993) acknowledges the application of this theory to the survival of those students who move away from their home community to attend college. However, the stress of separation is not so applicable to those students who attend institutions in their local community but Tinto suggests these students “. . . may not reap the full rewards that membership in college communities brings. The same disadvantage may apply to those individuals who elect to live at home while attending residential institutions” (p. 96). Further elaboration indicates that although these students may not experience difficulty in college persistence, they may in another setting. The value family places upon a college education will impact the persistence of students regardless of their locale to the institution.

The second stage, transition, is the period “during and after that of separation” (Tinto, 1993, p. 97). This represents the phase between separation from old norms and values and complete adoption of the new norms and values associated with the new setting. A number of factors impact the period of time necessary for transition. The most evident factor is the similarities or dissimilarities between the norms and values of the old setting and those of the new setting. Students coming to university settings without the proper social and intellectual skills associated with college environments, experience

significant persistence challenges. Tinto reinforces the idea that “differences in individual goals and intentions have much to do with a person’s response to the stress of transition” (p. 98).

The third and final stage of the interactionalist’s model is incorporation—represented by full integration into the campus setting. This process of shifting from one community to another (e.g. the campus community) involves a concerted effort by the student to successfully connect and function within the norms and values of the new setting. “[U]nlike those being incorporated into the traditional societies which were of interest to Van Gennep, individuals in college are rarely provided with formal rituals and ceremonies whereby such connectedness is ratified” (Tinto, 1993, p. 99). Tinto suggest that institutions provide a plethora of “formal and informal mechanisms” (e.g. fraternities, sororities, student government associations and other academic program societies) to foster student integration to the campus community (p. 99). These social-networking activities and organizations serve to keep the student engaged in the new community and may foster incorporation into the college environment (p. 99).

Within this context, Tinto (1993) introduces the notion of defining a college campus as “multiple community system” (p. 123). The campus community may support a system of social and academic “subcultures” to assist the student in the process of integration to the larger campus community. “[S]maller campus communities, formal and informal, may play an important role in enabling newcomers to find an early physical, social, and academic anchorage during the transition to college life” (p. 125). Tinto adds that for minority students, these racial/ethnic subcommunities may serve as “safe havens”

to foster the stability necessary for many to persist on predominantly White college campuses (p. 124). The key caveat in Tinto's discussion of the value of college subcultures in persistence behavior is that these communities may be "internal or external" to the university (p. 125).

Tinto (1993) implies that many first year students, recently removed from familial and community ties, do not possess the interpersonal skills necessary to establish the relationships required to successfully integrate into the college environment. "Without external assistance, many will eventually leave the institution because they have been unable to establish satisfying intellectual and social membership" (p. 99). Tinto acknowledges the value of Van Gennep's work in the foundation of the current student retention model but recognizes the gap in considering the processes that lead to incorporation unfold in the university setting. Extension to Emile Durkheim's work is necessary at this juncture in the theory.

Tinto (1993) asserts that the use of Durkheim's research in suicidal behavior does not suggest any association between institutional departure and suicide. However, there are similarities that validate examination. The most significant correlation is that both behaviors represent a pattern of "voluntary withdrawal from local communities" (p. 99) that may be attributed more to the nature of the system than to the individual. In these illustrations, suicide and student departure, the behavior may manifest in rejecting the opposing norms and values. It is suggested that communities with social condition that tend to retard membership, most often had high rates of suicide. A hypothesis of Durkheim's studies is that a social and intellectual restructuring of society, which would

reject any value for family and church, may foster an individual's integration to the norms and values of society and thereby, reduce the rates of suicide. Tinto concurs that Durkheim's restructuring of society to include provisions for social integration suggests the value of communities and the paralleled worth in discussions of college communities.

The application of Durkheim's theories of suicidal behavior does not lend to suggesting that voluntary departures from college equates educational suicide but it introduces a frame of reference for analyzing the factors of social and intellectual communities that may influence the student's decision to remain in college. Tinto (1993) characterizes Durkheim's theory as a "descriptive model" (p. 104) for defining the conditions that may lead to departure behavior and not to explain how individuals make the decision to leave college.

The adaption of Durkheim's theory to student departure must include caveats such as modifying the theory to one of individual student behavior and recognizing the inadequacies of suggesting correlation between college communities and the overall structure of society.

In the efforts to develop a theory of student departure from the work of Durkheim and Van Gennep, Tinto (1993) suggests notable differences between campus communities and the concept of broader societal communities. Tinto characterizes campus communities as bipolar entities, in that; the composition is defined by "distinct academic and social components" (p. 105). The nature of human communities is that of a goal toward permanent residency. Such is not the case for campus communities, which are defined by temporary residency and for commuter students; any notions of residency

are nonexistent. “For them [commuter students], events external to the college play an important role in community membership” (p. 105).

The challenge with applying Durkheim and Van Gennep to college student departure is that campus environments are often not “homogeneous or monolithic” in nature (Tinto, 1993, p. 105). The dynamics of a college campus may generally be defined by a set of norms and values but university setting is often characterized in terms of subcultures with distinct value systems. Tinto asserts that student persistence does not depend upon acceptance of the general norms and values of the campus but membership and support within one of the subcultures is necessary. The notion is that this concept of membership represents the student taking an active role in their transition to the new community. Tinto’s model challenges the degree of assimilation suggested by Durkheim and Van Gennep. “Though some degree of integration in the collegiate setting is seen as necessary for persistence, it need not imply the sort of conformity or consensus that Durkheim and Van Gennep may have envisioned in their work” (p. 105).

Liu and Liu (1999) explain that theories grounded in the sociological explanations of student departure are not limited to the personal decisions of the students but also include factors such as the campus environment. The authors suggest that Durkheim’s conception of anomic suicide is similar to the notions of involuntary student departure (p. 537).

Entrance into institutions of higher education, and therefore entrance into a new society necessitates, to varying degrees, a severance of ties to the individual’s past society. This severance of ties catalyzes the creation of anomic, or a state of confusion and insecurity, which can lead to anomic suicide in the form of student departure. (Liu & Liu, 1999, p. 537)

In addition to the potential trauma associated with severing ties associated with past communities, Liu and Liu (1999) add that there are additional factors that may impede the successful integration of college students to the campus environment. For example, some of the socioeconomic factors include household income and the educational level of the parents or guardians. College students, whose parents have not been exposed to any avenues of postsecondary education, have a limited perspective regarding the necessary commitment and resources required for degree attainment.

Tinto (1993) acknowledges the achievements in research on student departure and the knowledge gained to develop some overall characteristics. In the last decade, as college campuses become more diverse, the need to examine student departure among various student groups has become increasing more valuable. Such research challenges the generalization of student departure models. Tinto suggests the flaw in developing a model that generalizes the experiences of all college students.

[W]e must be careful, however, to avoid the tendency to attribute to each and every member of a group of individuals or institutions the characteristics which may serve to describe the group generally. It would be a serious mistake to assume that all group members are alike in their experience of higher education or that all institutions, however similar in structure, exhibit similar patterns of student leaving. This is particular true in studies of “students of color” and “adult students.” (Tinto, 1993, p. 72)

The research to examine student departure behavior is symbolic of decades of foundational work by scholars; building on the efforts of many forerunners, redesign traditional theoretical frameworks in this field of study. As the landscape of higher education transforms and as college student populations become increasingly more

diverse, the components to revolutionize the traditional retention paradigms must also reflect a corresponding transformation.

Application to Diverse Student Populations

Hurtado and Carter (1997) examine the experiences of Latino college students couched in Tinto's theoretical model of students' departure. The authors seek to understand the academic achievement of racial and ethnic minorities who have historically experienced challenges in mainstream educational settings. Their contention is that examining the students' sense of belonging may lead to an understanding of how college experiences impact the student departure phenomena of diverse groups. It is suggested that studying a student's sense of belonging will allow the researcher the avenue of assessing Tinto's notion of social interaction that allegedly promotes the students' integration to the college environment.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that maintaining familial connections was a critical element for the persistence patterns of Latino students. Participation in social-community and religious organizations suggest the value in connections with external communities to foster the student's sense of belonging. This challenges Tinto's suggestion that students should disconnect from former communities to successfully integrate to the college environment. Additionally, hostile campus environments resulted in a negative effect on the sense of belonging of the Latino students in this study. This supports notions that discriminatory campus cultures contribute to the alienation of minority students and thus, may result in student departure events.

Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) describe the theoretical considerations that must be examined with the application of Tinto's interactionalist's theory to the experiences of non-White college students. The authors provide a historical context for the origins of the interactionalist's theory and its application to the study of non-White groups in mainstream society. During the 1960s, social scientists established the connection between interactionalist's theory and the acculturation/assimilation perspective in the various studies conducted to examine the integration of minority groups into the mainstream society.

Interactionalist theorists assert that unless minority groups assimilated to the norms and values of the dominant culture, they would remain entrenched in a cycle of poverty and deprivation that would impede their acculturation to mainstream society (Rendón et al., 2000). Rendón et al. add that in the decades to follow, critics challenged such a theory that proposed White ideologies should serve as the model for evaluating the value of all other ethnic groups and more problematic were the notion that minority groups were categorized as "inferior, deviant, and self-destructive" (p. 128) when failing to conform to the dominant culture.

Rendón et al. (2000) introduce the problems associated with the assimilation/acculturation nature of Tinto's model serving as the theoretical framework for examining minority persistence behaviors. It is suggested that the application of Tinto's interactionalist's theory to minority college student retention enlists the following issues that scholars in this field are encouraged to address:

1. The focus of assimilation/acculturation research is the academic failure associated with groups who fail to assimilate to the norms and values of the dominant culture. More recent research examines academic success and the associated factors (p. 141).
2. This model excludes the contextual and historical forces which may impact the persistence of minority students in mainstream higher education. For example, racial and gender discrimination are social factors that may impede the retention of minority students. It is suggested that researchers assume minority students are afforded the same opportunities as their white, middle-class peers. Therefore, class is another factor that is often excluded in the development of theoretical frameworks in retention research (Rendón et al., 2000, pp. 141–142).
3. Researchers, prescribing to the assimilation/acculturation framework, tend to focus on the cultural differences as attributed to minority student dropouts instead of the systemic factors (e.g. tracking, low expectations, and funding inequities), which may impede their academic success (p. 142).
4. Traditional theoretical assumptions and paradigms, often based on empirical research involving white, middle-class male subjects in the 18—24 age range, fail to incorporate the cultural and racially relevant factors critical to examining the persistence behavior of minority students (pp. 142–143).
5. The failure and/or inability to develop testable theories germane to various student groups do not contribute practical applications for institutions in their study of college student retention (p. 143).

Rendón et al. (2000) assert that as minority students change the landscape of mainstream campuses, it is critical to examine the persistence behaviors of these student populations in the development of applicable student retention theories. Revisions to Tinto's model within the cultural constructs of diverse student populations are necessary to draw accurate conclusions for workable policy development and implementation in the field of student retention.

Kuh and Love (2000) analyze Tinto's theory by examining student departure through a cultural lens. This study attends to students from historically underrepresented

groups who tend to experience significant persistence challenges in mainstream higher education. The authors attest that Tinto's model "lacks robust empirical support, may be inadequately operationalized (i.e. academic and social integration), and is based on assumptions that understate institutional responsibility for creating hospitable learning conditions" (p. 198). Through an examination of the role of the campus culture and cultural perspectives of the student, the authors define the following eight propositions deemed to attribute to premature student departure.

1. The college experience, including a decision to leave college, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning-making system.
2. One's cultures of origin mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.
3. Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's cultural milieu.
4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.
5. Students who traverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.
6. The amount of time a student spends in one's culture of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.
7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.
8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence. (Kuh & Love, 2000, p. 201)

Kuh and Love (2000) assert this cultural view of student departure aligns with Tinto's interactionalist's theory. Despite the absence of specific reference to American Indian culture, these generalized propositions can be redefined to incorporate the value of tribal culture considerations when examining the persistence behaviors of Native students. The cultural reference point of every student is a critical component to the examination of their decision to persist in college. But the flaw with such generalize theory development is two-fold, in that, such practice yields the oversimplification of diversity among students and the failure to consider the value of testing theories for practical application to non-White student populations such as American Indians.

Application to Native Students

Museus and Quaye (2009) examine and revise Kuh and Love's (2000) cultural propositions, developed as another iteration of Tinto's internationalist theory, for practical application to the study of the experiences of minority college students. The authors employ qualitative research methodologies to critically examine and refine the work of Kuh and Love. Such studies are representative of the foundational nature of research in the field of student retention—researchers examine and modify numerous elements of Tinto's theory for application to different student groups and in this case, American Indian college student. These scholars join the ranks of their colleagues (Scott, 1986; Murguiá, Padilla, & CHiXapkaid (Pavel), 1991; Rendón et al., 2000; Belgarde & Loré, 2003; Huffman, 2008, 2010) who challenge the cultural bias and inadequate ethnic considerations of Tinto's model in the examination of minority college student experiences.

Museus and Quaye (2009) introduce the following alternatives to Kuh and Love's (2000) cultural framework for examining student departure behavior among minority students:

- Based on empirical evidence (Dehyle, 1995; Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto, 1998; Museus, 2008b; Tierney, 1992), the authors support the value of cultural integrity in the persistence of minority college students. “. . . racial/ethnic minority college students benefit from being secure in their own heritages . . .” Ethnic student organizations were cited as venues for minority students to gain that “cultural familiarity” necessary for successful persistence (p. 71).
- The cultural perspective and the suggested propositions are vital to validate empirical studies that examine the persistence behaviors of minority college students. (p. 71).
- It is suggested that minority students establish connections with “cultural agents (e.g., faculty and peers)” to foster the necessary relationships to lead to positive college experiences and to provide a venue to support and encourage their cultural heritage. “Collective agents provide students with smaller and more manageable environments within the larger campus; offer a conduit for socialization into the larger campus community . . .” (Museus & Quaye, 2009, pp. 71-72).

These alternatives represent the need for incorporating discussions of culture in the on-going studies of minority student persistence behaviors. Further empirical studies with minority student subjects are necessary for accurate representation of the impact of culture on the experiences of non-White students—the subjects historically guiding the development of theory in the field of college student retention. Inaccurately generalizing the experiences of all college students for theory to guide institutional policy continues the marginalization of students of color in mainstream higher education. It is customary to build from models such as Tinto's interactionalist's theory but researchers must expose

all limitations and caveats that may be problematic for application to other student populations such as American Indians.

Despite widespread application of Tinto's theory in the study of student retention, there are authors who challenge the validity of this particular model for examining the experiences of non-White students, particularly since the frame of reference for Tinto's model is assimilation/acculturation ideologies (Attinasi, 1989, 1994; Huffman, 2010; Tierney, 1992; Kraemer, 1997). However, Tinto's model does serve as the springboard for a number of studies examining the experiences of minority, more specifically American Indian students, in mainstream higher education. Huffman (2010) asserts, ". . . few theories are as controversial among scholars of minority education . . . despite its many detractors, interactionist's theory is prominently found in the American Indian education literature" (p. 122).

Huffman (2010) suggests that a great number of Native scholars examine and critique the application of Tinto's three stages of college transition in the area of American Indian higher education. "Curiously, however, little research specifically examines these stages or even identifies their existence in the college experiences of Native students" (p. 132). Studies examining the experiences of American Indian college students in mainstream higher education incorporate components or aspects of Tinto's student departure model in an effort to develop indigenous-based theories or models for addressing Native student retention.

One of the earliest efforts of Native scholars to apply a modified version of Tinto's interactionist's theory to the experiences of American Indian college students

was research by Murguiá et al. (1991). The social integration component of Tinto's model serves as the reference point to examine the role of ethnicity in the integration of small sample of Hispanic and American Indian students in a southwestern university. The authors suggest that an individual's ethnicity serves as a frame of reference for successful integration within the campus community. There is agreement with Tinto's suggestion of social integration through smaller subunits of the campus environment. Minority students will seek to "scale down" the intimidating larger campus community through smaller social groups particularly those receptive of their cultural norms and values.

Murguiá et al. (1991) suggest the following recommendations for refining Tinto's concept of social integration:

1. Ethnicity can be an important conditioning element in the social integration process. Ethnicity can limit access to majority enclaves either through self-selection or through enforced segregation. If in fact a student's access is limited largely to ethnic enclaves, then the efficacy of those enclaves in socializing the student to campus life become paramount.
2. Because social integration involves participation in enclaves rather than in the campus as a whole, social integration needs to be measured with respect to these enclaves. Well-calibrated measurements of ethnicity and enclave efficacy at socializing students' needs to be included in an operational definition of social integration.
3. Data analysis should reflect this underlying structure of campus life and pay particular attention to ethnic enclaves if the research involves ethnic participants. (p. 436)

These ideas include important caveats that suggest further research is warranted with larger sample sizes and the use of more quantitative research designs instead of sole reliance on qualitative data collection methods. The authors also suggest the

reconstruction of other components of Tinto's model to examine the experiences of minority students.

In a follow-up study, Pavel and Padilla (1993) assess the extent to which Tinto's interactionist's theory, or a modified version, account for the factors that impact postsecondary departure behavior of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. Incorporating the statistical technique structural equation modeling, the authors chose to analyze AI/AN data from a national longitudinal dataset provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

An initial confirmatory analysis found a weak fit between the Tinto model and the AI/AN sophomore cohort data. However, during an exploratory analysis, minor revisions to the model suggest that family background, postsecondary intentions (both prior to and during college), and formal and informal integration are the most significant aspects of Tinto's model that influence AI/AN postsecondary outcomes. (p. 14)

Additionally, factors such as academic preparedness, initial postsecondary intentions, and goal commitment were determined to impact academic integration for the sophomore and senior cohorts in the study. The authors suggest that these findings support the development of programs that foster increased familial involvement and extending the reach of the institution to involve high school students in early college experiences (Pavel & Padilla, 1993).

Tierney (1992), situated in a social constructivist perspective, credits some aspects of Tinto's model but like other scholars, challenges its full application in examining the experiences of American Indian college students. Tierney credits Tinto for incorporating personal factors (i.e. financial status and educational preparedness) to

developing a comprehensive instead of individualistic framework for examining student departure in higher education.

To his considerable credit, Tinto has developed a conceptual model that calls for investigation and analysis at the foundational level rather than simply at the causal level. Instead of merely accepting the scaffolding upon which he has built his theory, researchers need to interrogate the assumptions of that scaffolding. (Tierney, 1992, p. 607)

Another positive attribute to Tinto's model is the manner in which it has transformed how retention researchers now characterize departure events with a consideration of return instead of assuming "dropout" in every instance (Tierney, 1992). Credibility is also provided on the application of Tinto's model to examining the departure of different student groups such as traditional-aged versus nontraditional-aged students and full-time versus part-time students. However, from an anthropological perspective, Tierney (1992) challenges certain aspects of Tinto's theory when considering American Indian students in mainstream colleges and universities.

Tierney (1992) takes umbrage with the social integrationists' notion of characterizing college attendance as a "rite of passage." Van Geneep's theories on rites of passage apply to the specific culture of Indigenous peoples in New Zealand and thus, are perverted when considered within the context of higher education communities.

The first problem, then, with social integrationist theory is that it borrows an anthropological term—ritual—yet extracts the term from its cultural foundations. One cannot speak of ritual without first considering the cultural contexts in which that ritual is embedded. In the case of American higher education we find that colleges and universities reflect the culture of the dominant society. In America, that dominant culture is white. (Tierney, 1992, p. 608)

[I]f social integrationists are to employ an anthropological term, such as a ritual, then of necessity they must take into account the cultures in which those rituals exist. If one does so with regard to Tinto's model, one finds that he has developed an analytic tool that is dysfunctional: individuals from one culture, such as Apache, are to undergo a ritual in another culture, such as Anglo. (Tierney, 1992, pp. 608-609)

Another criticism of the application of the anthropological term, ritual, to the academic venue is the erroneous assumption that individuals take leave or depart from the ritual process. "In traditional cultures rites of passage do not have notions such as 'departure,' 'failure,' or 'dropout'" (p. 609). Although Tinto acknowledges the derogatory suggestions associated with the term "dropout," Tierney (1992) challenges his assumption that departure is a normal phenomenon. From the cultural perspective of rituals, individuals do not choose to participate nor do they choose to leave. Indigenous people recognize the value of these cultural ceremonies and therefore, departure is not an option for consideration.

For example, Markstrom and Iborra (2003) examine the Navajo female pubertal coming-of-age ceremony called Kinaalda' and the value of such rituals in the identity transformations of Indian youth. The Kinaalda' is a rite of passage for Navajo girls that is a celebration of entry into womanhood and firmly establishes them within the context of family life and Navajo society. Markstrom and Iborra cite Manookin's (1996) work for further expansion on the Kinaalda'.

Although the Kinaalda' endorses a certain type of social identity that is assigned or ascribed, it is significant to note that the initiate is not a passive recipient—the outcomes of this ceremony are partially dependent on her participation (Manookin, 1996). For instance, in the running ritual, it is believed that the length of her run is directly linked to her longevity. Furthermore, the attitude she holds

during the ceremony and her commitment to it are believed to determine her future well-being and personality development. In short, although an identity is ascribed during Kinaalda', the initiate must permit such ascription to occur. (Markstrom and Iborra, 2003, p. 419)

Tierney (1992) critiques Tinto on his failure to consider the cultural context associated with using the terms “ritual” or “rites of passage” within the framework of college student departure discussions. Anthropological terminologies employed to describe cultural constructs should not be adapted for generalized application within Eurocentric theory development.

The other component of Tierney's (1992) criticism is the idea that Tinto's model examines college attendance within an individualistic framework instead of the anthropological consideration of group formation. A model of integration that does not consider differences based on class, race, and gender is problematic. “Social integrationists assume that culture exists at a meta level—all cultures are similar and the institution merely reflects the culture of society” (p. 610). American Indian authors (Badwound, 1990; Benally, 1988; McNeley, 1988; Padilla & Pavel, 1989) also challenge Tinto's theory and argue the importance of tribal culture when developing theories regarding Native student departure in mainstream institutions.

Tierney (1992) suggests that Tinto's position as a faculty member in higher education is valid but his use of anthropological terminologies to describe generalized student behavior is problematic in discussions of American Indian education. “From an anthropological standpoint to emphasize ‘individual’ at the expense of the ‘group’ or the ‘culture’ is backwards” (p. 610). This narrow worldview of student departure erroneously

assumes that the experiences of White college students are representative of all student groups. Olneck (1990) characterizes student integration rhetoric as “the voice of white middle-class education professionals speaking about ‘problem’ groups and about the solutions to the problems posed by diversity” (p. 163). The landscape of American educational research is representative of a “one-size-fits-all” framework and mentality that groups the experiences of all minorities within one paradigm for comparison to the experiences of White students.

Taylor (2005) investigated the experiences of American Indian women who had completed graduate degrees in order to measure the usefulness of Tinto’s model in understanding their experiences in higher education. A significant portion of the sample was first-generation college graduates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and many were reared on reservations or in tribal communities. The majority of the respondents reported a strong identification with tribal culture and some level of fluency with a Native language. Most of the respondents indicated attending secondary schools some distance from their reservation or tribal community. These individual attributes were significant to Taylor’s application of Tinto’s theory.

The “standardized” or generic nature of Tinto’s model, proven to be a significant flaw in this study, discounts the diversity and cultural distinctiveness among and within tribes by assuming all Indigenous students share the same experiences. “Tinto falls prey to the old dilemma which compresses all indigenous populations into one homogeneous entity” (Taylor, 2005, p. 82). Additionally, Taylor (2005) also cites Tinto’s failure to consider socioeconomic status, gender, and age as factors relevant to a study of the

experiences of Native students. The cultural variations introduce a complex web for examining departure incidents among Indigenous students.

Taylor (2005) states,

While the Tinto Model does offer an excellent foundation for research, it does not address the complexity of American Indian culture or diversity in Native women's personal experience or assessment of their experience. It also does not explain why some culturally grounded American Indian women who consider themselves traditional are successful at the university level. (Taylor, 2005, p. 92)

Lundberg (2007) uses Tinto's model as the frame of reference to examine the experiences of American Indian college students who participated in a national study to assess the level of engagement on their university campus. The research method for Lundberg's study was based on an analysis of the responses from a national sample of American Indian students ($n = 643$) who took the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to ascertain the factors contributing to the success of student population.

The CSEQ is a self-report instrument designed with 166 items to assess the levels at which students expend effort in the higher education and the results these efforts have on the overall college experience. Lundberg's analysis of the CSEQ data affirms Tierney's (1992) assertion that a significant flaw in the interactionalist's model is that the burden of the responsibility for academic and social integration is placed upon the student rather than the institution. "It places greater responsibility on the institution to become acculturated to its students, rather than the students acculturating to the institution" (p. 412).

This particular study transforms the stance of Tinto's model from an individual-focused issue to one that is institutional-focused. Traditional retention theories, grounded in Eurocentric research methods, attribute the persistence challenges of minority students to their cultural differences instead of the monolithic nature of the mainstream campus culture. "In an environment where difference is valued and the social world is accepting of various cultures and values, Native American students may be more likely to engage in meaningful relationships with faculty . . ." (p. 414). Lundberg (2007) asserts the value of considering cultural differences in the examination of persistence behavior, particularly, among American Indian college students.

Huffman's (2008) ethnographic study examines the experiences of sixty-nine Native students using a framework similar to Tinto's student departure model. The data analysis process assigned students to four distinct categories—*assimilated*, *marginal*, *estranged*, and *transculturated*. Given the assimilationists nature of Tinto's model, Huffman identified the following three-stage process similar to account for the experiences of the assimilated Native students:

- **Enhanced Ethnic Awareness**—At this stage, assimilated students recognized their position as a minority on campus despite their alignment with the norms and values of the institution. As a result, students have heightened self-reflection of their ethnic identity. Contrary to Tinto's stage of separation, the focus of Huffman's enhanced ethnic awareness stage was tribal identity. The similarity between the two is that in both models, students must conduct a self-evaluation of the position upon entry to the campus setting. (Huffman, 2008, pp. 86-87).
- **Culturally Uncomplicated Transition**—As a result of alignment with the mainstream campus culture, assimilated students are not overwhelmed by cultural conflict a factor that often presents struggles for many Native students in predominantly white institutions. Huffman asserts that college transition

challenge for assimilated Native students is similar for non-Native students. Despite relative similarities to Tinto's transition stage, the distinct difference is that this stage in Huffman's model is limited to cultural issues experienced by assimilated Native students while Tinto's transition phase examines a plethora of transitional issues experienced by various student populations (Huffman, 2008, pp. 89–90).

- **Active Engagement**—Similar to Tinto's stage of incorporation, Huffman suggests that assimilated students in this phase have reached various levels of social and academic integration into the mainstream campus culture (pp. 90–91). "These included the ability to immediately be active in the rigors of study and test taking, forming social relations, and navigating the bureaucratic maze of the college." (Huffman, 2008, p. 90)

Huffman (2008) finds the assimilated student category is comprised of the following two subcategories: *inherited* and *disinherited* students. The distinction is based on the manner in which American Indian students view their own tribal heritage and values and how they perceive the cultural traditions of their Native peers.

Although most inherited students neither actively incorporated traditional American Indian values and worldview in their personal lives nor did most participate in traditional ceremonies, they did celebrate their American Indian heritage and were proud to claim it as their own. (Huffman, 2008, pp. 92–93)

In contrast, disinherited students did hold their tribal heritage and values in high regard. "Many of the disinherited students could not understand why culturally traditional people insisted on retaining their past and resisted adopting a lifestyle aligned with the cultural mainstream of American society" (p. 93). Huffman indicated that some disinherited students consider tribal culture "a barrier to the betterment of Native people" (p. 94).

Huffman (2008) concludes that this research contradicts prior notions that assimilated students are success stories of mainstream educational systems but what the

research does indicate is that these students are assimilated prior to entry to higher education. Despite the research findings of differing levels of assimilation, Huffman suggest further studies to examine these various degrees of assimilation among Native students. The general findings regarding the dispositions of the inherited and disinherited students are positive in certain areas and disconcerting in others. For instance, Huffman suggests that inherited students exhibit the willingness to foster their own tribal heritage and develop relationships with students from other tribes. On the contrary, disinherited students do not share these intents because it appears that their position in the campus culture is not conducive to such behavior. The suggestion is that disinherited students can indeed contribute a greater level of effort to fostering their cultural heritage and relationships with other Native students.

Huffman (2010) conducts a meta-analysis of two quantitative studies from the 1980s that support the application of Tinto's integration model to the experiences of American Indian college students. The findings of both studies support Tinto's theory that a correlation exists between success in college and the level of student integration with the campus culture. Kerbo (1981) examined the social integration of American Indian students at a number of universities in Oklahoma. One of his studies examined the importance of tribal culture and other factors relating to the acculturation and the success of American Indian students in predominantly White institutions.

Student GPA, as cited in this study, gauges college success (Huffman, 2010). Kerbo suggests that Native students must experience some level of assimilation to be successful in mainstream higher education. Huffman (2010) asserts,

When this feeling of fitting in is achieved. Native American students may come to feel that they equal whites in ability to perform in college. Thus, a contextual definition of the self is achieved which leads to better college performance. It is not valuing education more that is important, or other acculturation factors, but simply the confidence in one's ability to achieve something that may also be highly valued by all (or most) Native American college students. (p. 1279)

Similarly, Scott (1986) also examined the key factors affecting academic success of a group of American Indian students enrolled at the University of Oklahoma. The findings suggest that tribal culture is actually an impediment to the integration of the Native students on this campus. One avenue in predicting the academic success of these students is the level of academic preparedness prior to entering the college setting.

The second avenue revolves around considerations that are not strictly academic ones. The findings clearly show that being a "cultural Indian" reduces the chances of academic success. Independent of all other considerations, including how much measured academic ability the student has, such a student is more likely to fail because he or she is less likely to become integrated into the university community. (Scott, 1986, pp. 392-393)

Scott (1986) proposes strategies to facilitate the integration of American Indian students into the university setting. The culture conflict experienced by many Native students attending predominantly White institutions is often perpetuated by the lack of institutional commitment to valuing indigenous ways. The constructs, values and norms established to promote the academic success of students may "run at cross-purposes and actually undermine academic success" (p. 393) of American Indian students.

Belgarde and Loré (2003) draw from Tinto's theory to study the experiences of Native students at the University of New Mexico. The study examined the impact of the Native American Studies Academic and Retention and Intervention (NASARI) Program

on the persistence, retention, and graduation rates of these students through a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) study. The findings reveal that Native students who participated in the NASARI Program attempted and earned more academic credits than students who did not participate in this program. Additionally, a significant number (183 of 200 surveyed) of the students reported that their academic preparedness was not sufficient for success in higher education. Both of which represent features of Tinto's model that these scholars believe to have bearing when examining the persistence of Native students in higher education.

As with most scholars who study American Indian college students, Bergarde and Loré (2003) criticize the absence of cultural consideration in Tinto's interactionalist's theory. The authors argue that Tinto's model does not align with the indigenous philosophy of education and how these Native epistemologies formulate the Indian student's perspective of higher education. For example, the Navajo view is that individuals must learn through gaining knowledge for survival in the physical world while understanding their position within the context of this holistic model. In other words, the holistic perspective of American Indian education does not view learning within the context of transplanting youth from one community to another but through consideration of how the education will improve the individual, their family and tribal community. In contrast, Tinto's theory suggests an individualistic approach to education that is inconsistent with Native epistemologies.

The study shows that Native students were inactive or minimally active in support programs for various reasons such as time constraints, inadequate knowledge of the

values of these programs, and other commitments. “Many students place family and community values (e.g. meeting the needs of their family and participation in ceremonies/other traditional activities) ahead of individual needs—completing their college education in a timely manner” (p. 195). This implies that various programs will not solve the retention issues of Native students. Bergarde and Loré (2003) assert, “. . . unless these programs help bridge an understanding between value systems, then these programs will not necessarily succeed” (p. 195).

However, this does not suggest that Native students must abandon their value systems but that institutions should incorporate programs, which recognize the interconnectivity of tribal culture into every aspect of a student’s life. The University of New Mexico now offers other support programs (e.g. summer bridge for first-year and transfer students) that incorporate the learning community model as recommended in the basic tenets of Tinto’s theory (1993, p. 168). American Indian faculty serve as mentors in these learning communities and this fosters the student/faculty interaction viewed by Tinto as “an essential component of the intellectual and social life of the institution” (p. 167).

Despite the broad application of Tinto’s model, whether in the whole or in part, Huffman (2010) focuses on the following list of criticisms in applying the interactionalist theory to the experiences of minority students and more specifically to American Indian students:

- Tinto’s interactionalist theory offers a comprehensive general theory on student departure that accounts for the experiences of the most common type of college student—white, middle-class individuals.

- The assimilationist nature of Tinto’s theory “implies that American Indians, along with other minority students, need to weaken, if not sever, the ties with their families and communities.”
- The interactionalist theory asserts the burden of the responsibility for academic and social integration upon the student rather than on the institution (Huffman, 2010, pp. 147-149)

The generalized nature of earlier studies of student departure behavior did not provide the cultural considerations necessary to examine the experiences of minority college students and certainly not the tribal cultural considerations for a thorough and sufficient study to develop solid theories pertaining to the experiences of Native students in mainstream higher education.

Lundberg’s (2007) analysis of American Indian student data from the CSEQ provides empirical evidence to reposition the full burden of persistence from the individual student to a certain level of accountability on the institution. This concept transforms traditional retention paradigms based on Tinto’s model, which attributed student departures primarily to individual characteristics, norms, and values. Such studies provide solid evidence for validity in theoretical development that will account for the existence of difference in the myriad of experiences among diverse student populations. This challenges the prevalent assumption that all students experience college in the same fashion—an assumption guiding a plethora of educational research in the United States.

Other Scholars in the Study of College Student Persistence

The study of college student persistence consists of compounding models, which is defined as research built on the theories of pioneer scholars in the field and a substantial body of research branches into original studies—contributing new theories to

the knowledge base. Alexander Astin (1971), one of these early pioneers, contributes to the retention literature with his notions that attributes involvement in the college experience is one of the key factors directly influencing departure decisions. In the late 1960s, Astin engaged in research that involved hundreds of colleges and universities across the country to examine the college retention phenomenon. The findings of this early research suggests that a correlation exists between the level of physical and psychological energy students dedicate to their collegiate experience, (as defined in terms of social and academic aspects) and their departure decisions. Astin's model served as a foundation for myriad retention interventions on college campuses nationwide.

Astin's (1977) later research supports the notion that the college experience has greater impact on the changes after college entry than maturity of the student. "For certain outcomes, student involvement is more strongly associated with change than either entering freshman characteristics or institutional characteristics" (p. 220). Astin presents the following nine forms of student involvement: place of residence, honors programs, undergraduate research participation, social fraternities and sororities, academic involvement, student-faculty interaction, athletic involvement, involvement in student government, and verbal aggressiveness (p. 220). His theory is that student-faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with their college experience than any of the aforementioned forms of involvement. "Students who interact frequently with faculty are more satisfied with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even administration of the institution" (p. 223). Astin (1993) expands this study by adding low student-faculty

ratio as one of the analytic measures considered when examining the environmental measures that impact student outcomes. This school of thought introduces the notion that institutions should develop programs to foster student-faculty relationships beyond the classroom setting.

Building on this research, Pascarella and Terenzini (1978, 1979a, 1979b) incorporate the theoretical explanatory model of Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975), which also supports the positive impact of informal student-faculty relationships on college persistence. The results of their study suggest that student-faculty informal relationships may significantly contribute to variance in extrinsic (academic performance) and intrinsic (self-perceived intellectual and personal development) educational outcomes during the freshman year. The findings suggest that the positive association between student-faculty informal relationships and educational outcomes are not solely attributable to the initial intellectual abilities and personal dispositions of the students but indeed imply the value of informal student-faculty interaction. As a result of these findings, the scholars recommend the development of freshman programs to highlight the value of student-faculty interaction as a component of the campus culture.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions to this body of research is the meta-analysis by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) in which they synthesize two decades of scholarship dedicated to the study of college student outcomes. This work begins with a detailed discussion of how research on college outcomes evolved as a field of study and proceeds with a synthesis of the developmental models of Arthur Chickering, Lawrence Kohlberg, and William Perry, who is credited to “probably had more influence than any

others on the study of college's impact on students and on institutional policies and programs specifically designed to shape student development" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 18). Other topics examined in this project include the influence of college in areas such as student learning and cognitive development, various dimensions of personal growth and change and moral development. A significant portion examines the impact of the college experience on socioeconomic attainment which encompasses the areas of educational, occupational, and economic attainment. The careful examination of these topics concludes with a discussion of the implications for institutional practice and decision-making in the public policy arena.

Bean (1980, 1983) is best known for his theoretical models of student retention, which is a fusion of his foundations in the areas of organizational theory and psychology and the sociological approaches of Vincent Tinto. His work is among the most cited in the field of student retention. Bean's strategy to adapt Price and Mueller's (1981) model of employee turnover in business organizations lead to the development of his landmark theory for examining college student attrition. Bean incorporated the following five exogenous variables from Price and Mueller's model: routinization, participation, instrumental communication, integration, and distributive justice with his five variables (grades, practical value, development, courses, and membership in the campus organization). Bean concludes that nine of the ten variables have a positive effect on student satisfaction with the exception of routinization. He theorizes that the likelihood of marriage and opportunity to transfer to another institution are two additional factors that influence the student's decision to leave an institution.

Antonio (2004) joins the ranks of scholars in the strand of college persistence research that supports the impact of college peer groups on intellectual self-confidence and educational aspirations (Astin, 1977, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This particular researcher acknowledges the impact and relevance growing racial diversity on university campuses has in this field of study. The growth in racial diversity in mainstream higher education introduces another factor to these college persistence models. “[I]ssues of racial and ethnic difference pervade many corners of the university, and questions regarding student experiences and student development on today’s campuses...” (p. 447).

One noteworthy finding in this study directs attention to the influence of racial and ethnic diversity among the student groups. In terms of degree aspirations, students with diverse friendship groups (11%) ascribe to baccalaureate degree goals while a larger portion (18%) of homogeneous friendship group have lower aspirations (Antonio, 2004, p. 458). Ethnic and racial diversity is also a significant factor for minority students in the area of intellectual self-confidence. Antonio (2004) found the following in this regard:

For students of color, a diverse interpersonal environment of friends appears to enhance intellectual self-confidence regardless of the academic ability, educational trajectories, or degree of self-confidence possessed by themselves or by their closest friends. For white students, friendship-group diversity, at best, has no bearing on their intellectual self-confidence. (Antonio, 2004, p. 461)

This research supports the notion that minority students in mainstream institutions find value in the support of interpersonal relationships with other students of color on their campus. On-campus structured social support is a common theme in the persistence

studies that focus on American Indian students in predominantly White colleges and universities (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997; Murguiá et al., 1991).

Summary of the Literature

Vincent Tinto's (1987, 1993) interactionalist's theory serves as the cornerstone and most frequently cited framework to guide research in college student persistence. Tinto's theory, grounded in the work of Emile Durkheim and Arnold Van Gennep, serves as the reference point for a plethora of studies intended to analyze, dissect, and even exalt Tinto's work in part and in its entirety. Despite criticism and attempts to reconstruct Tinto's model, the interactionalist's theory remains at the core of studies to examine the persistence behaviors of college students from various populations. Student persistence research remains an open strand with one study building on the findings of another. One may even refer to this field of study as a work-in-progress.

Studies, to examine the experiences of American Indian college students within the context of Tinto's model, are valuable to this body of research. Such studies will provide opportunities to identify the problems with the application of standardized theoretical frameworks to develop generalized notions regarding the experiences of all college students. This particular study will serve as an assessment of the applicability of Tinto's model or components thereof to American Indian college students at UNC Pembroke. However, an important caveat in this process is to avoid the arbitrary application of any conceptualized theory to all Native student populations. The diversity

among Indigenous tribal nations in North America alone inhibits universal concepts for the application to all American Indian tribes.

This literature review represents a selection of scholars whose exploratory work provides a diverse foundation for examining the experiences of Native students with Tinto's model serving as the reference point. To validate the use of Tinto's model for this study, it was important to incorporate scholarly works to critique and support the worth of this model to the study of college student persistence, the application of this model to the field of American Indian higher education and also present other scholars in the field with distinct research interests beyond work grounded in the theories of Vincent Tinto.

Silverman et al. (2009) present the challenges of commuter, part-time, transfer, and returning (CPTR) students and their associated obstacles in higher education. This research is particularly applicable to a study of Native students at UNC Pembroke because a significant portion of American Indian student enrollment commutes to campus from their residence in the local community. The role of external relationships and commitments for the commuter student directly impacts their departure decision. Certainly not surprising, many residential students do not experience the challenges associated with external forces because their position on campus fosters the social and academic integration that Tinto's cites as important to the successful integration of college students. For example, familial and employment obligations limit the opportunities for commuter students to engage with faculty outside the classroom setting—another factor which positively contributes to the persistence patterns of college students.

The primary assertion of Tinto's model is that a direct correlation exists between the acculturation of college students and persistence to degree attainment. This is represented by the student's passage from past associations and connection to new associations (e.g. the university campus). Tinto asserts that this transition between communities is facilitated by abandoning the norms and values of the former community for ideologies of the campus community. The level of social and academic integration will determine the degree of college persistence. Huffman (2010) adds that Tinto's theory is also referred to as interactionalist's theory because the student's background characteristics (e.g. familial socioeconomic status, academic preparedness, race, etc.) impact the conditions for persistence and attrition (p. 129).

Tinto's model is problematic for full application to the experiences of American Indian college students. In recap, Huffman (2010) delineates three criticisms expressed by minority education researchers. The consensus among minority scholars, and particularly Native scholars, is that the assimilationists nature of this theory suggests that American Indian students must abandon their tribal culture and community to be successful in mainstream higher education—with success as defined by persistence to degree attainment. This suggestion clearly does not recognize the personal, emotional and spiritual significance of tribal culture for Native students. It is common for American Indian students to experience feelings of separation anxiety, alienation and depression when the tribal ties are challenged or disconnected (p. 147).

The interactionalist theory is charged with the development of a generalized framework of college student departure based on the persistence behavior of White,

middle-class students (Huffman, 2010, p. 147). This theory suggests that the experiences of all college students are the same or at least are similar. A plethora of characteristics (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status, academic preparedness, etc.) impact the manner in which a student experiences college and to imply that all students experience college in the same manner is to negate the value of these individual characteristics. It is problematic to assume that all American Indians experience college in the same manner so to suggest there are no differences between the experiences of White college students and Native students is absurd. In recent amendments to his earlier theories, Tinto does add the caveat that institutions should recognize the unique characteristics of diverse populations (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2002). The generalized umbrella of diversity will nonetheless fail to address the unique characteristics of American Indian college students.

Huffman (2010) asserts that the premise of Tinto's theory is that the burden of academic and social integration is the sole responsibility of the student. Therefore, their inability to persist is a direct result of the failure to align with the norms and values of the institution. One may assume that this position absolves institutions of their responsibility to develop policy and procedures to correspond with student needs (p. 148). Opponents would cite inadequate institutional commitment to addressing the systemic issues (e.g. institutional racism, limited financial support, and the absence of culturally relevant teaching & support programs), which may impede the persistence of American Indian students and other minority student populations (p. 149).

These three criticisms represent the themes in this review of literature on Tinto's interactionist theory. With modification, components of Tinto's model may be modified and incorporated into the studies of American Indian college student persistence. Rendón et al. (2000) introduce the concepts of biculturalism and dual socialization to explain how minority students can indeed make the transition to a college setting without the suggested separation associated with Tinto's theory.

The concept of biculturalism was developed by Charles A. Valentine (1971) to explain how people of color can balance between the mainstream culture and their ethnic culture simultaneously. This theory of biculturation was based upon the research of Steven Polgar (1960). Mesquakie teenage boys experienced their tribal culture and exposure to mainstream culture. It is possible for American Indian students to maintain a connection to their tribal heritage while accepting and even conforming to the norms and values of higher education. Tinto's suggestion of abandoning one culture for the adoption of another is not a plausible consideration for American Indian students.

Following the process of building upon prior research, de Anda (1984) elaborates on Valentine's (1971) concept of biculturation. Contrary to Valentine, de Anda posits the biculturation experience occurs because some level of overlap exists between the two cultures.

That is, the extent to which an individual finds it possible to understand and predict successfully two cultural environments and adjust his or her behavior according to the norms of each culture depends on the extent to which these two cultures share common values, beliefs, perceptions, and norms for prescribed behaviors. (de Anda, 1984, p. 102)

The convergence of these two worlds also challenges Tinto's theory of abandoning the old culture for membership in a new culture. The concepts of biculturation and dual socialization provide an acceptable pathway for persistence to those students whose cultural norms and values do not completely align with that of mainstream society.

Hurtado & Carter (1997) introduce a study that supports the value of external relationships (e.g. family and community) to the persistence behavior of Latino college students. This study and Huffman's work challenge Tinto's idea that college students must disconnect from former communities to successfully integrate to the campus environment. This is certainly a critical component that must be considered with the application of Tinto's model to minority college students. As indicated in the literature, the family connection is a sustaining relationship for many students of color as they seek to transition into the postsecondary environments. It is not uncommon for these familial relationships and responsibilities to result in negative impact on the departure decision. For the Native student, familial relationships are a critical component of tribal culture.

The suitable approach for mainstream institutions would be that instead of assuming Native students must disassociate from their culture, they should recognize the value for Indian students to maintain their tribal culture into this new setting. Institutions should develop programs to make this transition to college as seamless as possible—thereby lessen the “cultural shock” that many minority students, particularly, Native student experience during the first year of college. A number of institutions are incorporating summer bridge programs for the purpose of providing a seamless transition for first year students. Another example is the development of learning communities for

student athletes; honors program students, and teaching fellows. A similar program would be ideal for the transition of first-year American Indian students.

As minority students transform the landscape of mainstream higher education, educational research studies must be representative of these diverse student populations. For this to occur, theoretical research models must be transformed to reflect the experiences of the various student groups in higher education. The historical practice of developing blanket theories to generalize the experiences of all students must be transformed with further research with these diverse groups. Analysis, modification and transformative changes, through the continued research in student persistence, could indeed develop the proper modification to Tinto's theory and other educational research models for proper application to diverse student populations.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

Challenge to Western Theoretical Frameworks

The principal conclusion from the literature review in this study is that the tendency to apply Western research methodologies to the studies of Indigenous peoples is liken to the idiomatic expression of forcing a square peg into a round hole. The proverbial “square peg” is American Indian people and this “round hole” represents mainstream society. Educational studies of minority students, positioned within the constructs of Eurocentric theoretical frameworks, seek to develop universal theories to describe the educational experience of students of color while ignoring the cultural differences, which cannot be generalized. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) assert, “Indigenous scholars and native intellectuals are pressed to produce technical knowledge that conforms to Western standards of truth and validity” (p. 6). The goal of this study is to challenge the generalized application of Western ideologies to the experiences of Native students in predominantly White institutions of higher education.

Hatch (2002) delineates the following five foremost research paradigms employed by qualitative researchers in educational settings: positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical/feminist, and poststructuralist. Based on the generalized metaphysical elements of the critical/feminist perspective, scholars often position studies of minority populations,

marginalized by the social injustices of mainstream society, within this particular framework.

For critical theorists and feminists, the material world is made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals. These structures are perceived to be real (i.e. natural and immutable), and social action resulting from their perceived realness leads to differential treatment of individuals based race, gender, and social class. (Hatch, 2002, p. 16)

Bettie (2003) provides an example of one such generalized application of theory to the experiences of a particular minority group. In her research, she examines the constructs of gender, race and identity through the study of Mexican-American high school girls and positions this examination within a poststructuralist perspective. Deyhle (1995), in her study of the educational experiences of Navajo youth, also situates her research within the socioculturalist theories of Ogbu (1978, 1993) who attributes the drop out events of minority students to the racial stratification of U.S. societal constructs.

Early in my doctoral studies, it was my assumption as an inexperienced researcher that the academy held an expectation that my research must also be formulated within the context of these particular research paradigms. Given that assumption, I explored the myriad theoretical frameworks and aligned my research in like fashion—within the context of a Western paradigm that failed to directly acknowledge or address the distinct character of tribal culture. The following is a reflection of my attempt to force the “square peg” of American Indian research into the “round hole” of mainstream research paradigms. It is my effort to force American Indian research within the constructs of Western theoretical frameworks.

The qualitative epistemology of critical/feminist theory provides a suitable basis upon which we can appreciate, understand, and contextualize the experiences of American Indian college students—by “amplifying the voices” of these students to include the critical component necessary to examine their place in mainstream higher education. Fine (1994) introduces an intriguing concept in the discussion of how qualitative research in the field of education was used to “give voice to the oppressed.” This notion of “giving voice” to dominant groups is based on the colonist origins of ethnographic research and often minimized validity as this voice was often created by Anglo-Saxon interpretations of the “truth.” As a Native ethnographer, I understand that American Indian students most certainly have a voice and qualitative research is the venue for these voices to validate indigenous educational research.

Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) describe Native ethnographers within this context, “identity politics emerges out of the struggles of the oppressed or exploited groups to have a standpoint from which to critique dominant structures, a position that gives purpose and meaning to struggle” (p. 28). As an American Indian woman in the field of higher education, challenges to degree attainment are not only those expressed as experiences of college students recorded and reported in the literature—these represent my experiences as well. Additionally, commitment to my tribal heritage drives the desire to dedicate my research agenda to topics in the field of American Indian higher education. I am committed to the work to address the disparities that impede educational attainment for my People.

Examining the experiences of Native students at UNC Pembroke, a predominantly White institution, initiated the quest to disclose the factors in the lives of these students that may attribute to their success in higher education. This examination of the lives of Indian students within the context of a mainstream university can be defined under the umbrella of ethnographic research. Glesne (2006) posits the following definition for ethnography, one of the research approaches under the umbrella of qualitative inquiry:

Ethnography comes from the Greek *ethnos* meaning a people or cultural group and *graphic* meaning describe. Ethnographic literally means to describe a people or cultural group. Using culture as the theoretical framework for studying and describing a group, ethnography is associated with anthropology and also, to some extent, with sociology. (Glesne, 2006, pp. 8-9)

As a Native student, I believe that culture, the bedrock of ethnographic research, will formulate the nucleus of the discussions with these students and hence, serve as the frame of reference for how they perceive their position on the college campus.

To challenge the traditional notions of ethnographic research conducted within an extended period time in the field, I believe my position in the tribal community and shared experiences as a Native student satisfies the continuity requirement for such a classification. Glesne (2006) suggests “long-term immersion in the field” is necessary for the researcher to develop a “thick description” of understanding the manner in which a group “constructs and share meaning” (p. 9). In this study, the time necessary to develop this “thick description” is representative of my lifetime as a member in the local tribal community that surrounds the UNCP campus.

For the purpose of this research, I adapted Glesne's (2006) "broad-brush" use of the term *ethnography* that she uses interchangeable with *qualitative* "to refer to practices that seek to interpret people's constructions of reality and identity patterns in their perspectives and behaviors" (p. 9). Sharing in this school of thought, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) cite the recent practice of "educational researchers to use the term ethnography to refer to any qualitative study . . ." (p. 32).

Bogdan and Biklen add,

Some declare that the concept of 'culture' as used by anthropologists asserts a structure, continuity, and pervasiveness of meaning among people that symbolic interactionists do not embrace. For symbolic interactionists, meaning is much more to be found in the particular situation rather than in the group studied. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 32)

This study is indeed that—an examination of the factors, perceptions, beliefs, notions, backgrounds, and even cultural traits—all of which may define the experiences of American Indian students at UNC Pembroke and may also highlight undisclosed areas of my experiences as a college student in mainstream higher education.

Goodall (2000) seeks to challenge the restrictive limitations of traditional ethnographic research with innovative techniques and ideologies that he brands the "new ethnography." There are notions that frame the appropriateness, merit, and validation of scholarly writing in academia but Goodall attacks this oppression and marginalization with challenges for his readers to confront these barriers with a new form of ethnographic writing. Of particular value to this study is the call to "discuss the role of gender, of race, of class, of sexual orientation, in all that we do" (p. 29). As an American Indian student

and faculty member, I believe that race impacts the experiences of many Native people in mainstream higher education and I believe this research will provide the platform to an open and frank dialogue of these shared experiences.

Goodall (2000) posits the following oppositions to such new forms of ethnographic writing: “. . . worry about the role of the emotions in scholarly writing, concern for revealing what is personal in what is suppose to be professional, the ethics of writing stories that get readers to closely identify with them” (p. 190). My goal in this research study encompasses these forbidden restrictions that serve as the bedrock of “appropriate” academic writing but appropriately provide a correlation between my experiences in higher education and those of a younger generation following my path.

The following describes Goodall’s opposition to traditional ethnography:

Scholarly writing features prose that is largely self-less. It is writing that avoids references to s self, or doubt, or procedural ambiguities, or personal vulnerabilities. As we, it is writing that makes no references to the quality of lived experiences as a person, an academic, or a field researcher. It is writing that, looked at one way, is ungendered, divorced from class consciousness, and is unable or unwilling to give voice to its own racial or sexual subjectivity. It is writing disconnected from its cultural and institutional contexts. (pp. 190-191)

New ethnography, ideally, does *not* behave in any of these ways. It is writing that is untamed, and in some rhetorical ways undisciplined. It overtly privileges the personal over the so-called objective, and if it is good, it dissolves any idea of distance, doesn’t produce “findings,” isn’t generalizable, only has credibility when self-reflexive and authority when richly vulnerable. (Goodall, 2000, p. 191)

Hence, based on Goodall’s notion of what constitutes ethnographic work and his definition of this “new ethnography” in the field of qualitative research, I position myself in the role of Native ethnographer for this study.

In this role, I examine the experiences of American Indian college students through the lens of the critical/feminist research paradigm. The ontological belief of critical/feminist theory is that the socio-cultural structure of the world impacts opportunities available for subordinate groups in a Eurocentric culture. For centuries, the American educational system has marginalized Native students by forced acculturation and near obliteration of tribal cultures and values. Based upon the ideologies of middle-class White males, the system established and implemented for the education of American Indians was intended to annihilate tribal cultures for assimilation of “educated” Natives into mainstream society.

In retrospect, I believe the application of generalized theories to explain and/or define the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream educational systems represents a marginalization of tribal culture. Even an attempt to assimilate Indigenous scholars to the mainstream ideologies affixed to the academy. As a Native scholar, I challenge the expectation in educational research that studies in American Indian education must be positioned within a predefined group of theoretical frameworks to be validated in academy. It stands to reason that American Indians continue to experience challenges in mainstream educational systems when studies are situated within the framework of Eurocentric ideologies, which assume the experiences of American Indian students should mirror those of other minorities with overall comparison to the experiences of their Caucasian peers. This expectation erroneously categorizes the challenges of Native and other non-White college students in mainstream educational

systems as a “group problem” instead of the actual “systemic problem” that requires conformity for the achievement of success.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) challenges the use of critical, interpretative performance theory and critical race theory in indigenous research unless careful modifications are applied to consider tribal cultural differences. These academics endorse Bishop’s (2005) position that critical theory marginalizes the position of Native people. “Critical theory’s criteria for self-determination and empowerment perpetuate neocolonial sentiments while turning the indigenous person into an essentialized ‘other’ who is spoken for” (p. 5). Historically, indigenous and other minority cultures are not considered in the development of any Western research paradigms. In fact, the mainstream dominant culture, governed by Anglo-Saxon ideologies, most often serves as the reference point for overall comparison. If minority groups are considered in Eurocentric paradigms, the erroneous assumption is that all non-White groups must be categorized in a single group for comparison to the norm—Anglo-Saxon, middle-class males. This neocolonial practice negates the value of minorities, women and most specifically for this discussion—Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Methodology Defined

As a Native scholar, I support the incorporation of indigenous methodologies, which transcends the generalized research methods historically applied to the study of Native peoples. In describing indigenous research methodology, Louis (2007) challenges the assignment of a specific definition as emblematic of Western research methodologies.

They [indigenous research methodologies] are fluid and dynamic approaches that emphasise circular and cyclical perspectives. Their main aim is to ensure that research on Indigenous issues is accomplished in a more sympathetic, respectful, and ethically correct fashion from an Indigenous perspective. (p. 133)

The application of Western research methodologies and Eurocentric theoretical frameworks to the studies of Indigenous peoples negates the validity of tribal heritage and culture.

Wilson (2008) challenges the notion that dominant research paradigms must be used for comparison to validate an indigenous research paradigm. “Critiquing other research paradigms or justifying my own through citing others would constitute a recognition of their jurisdiction over Indigenous research” (p. 42). I concur with Wilson’s argument that any expectation to validate indigenous research paradigms with a comparison to those developed within the context of Eurocentric ideologies degrades the value and worth of our research within the academy. “Unfortunately Indigenous researchers have often had to explain how their perspective is different from that of dominant system scholars; dominant scholars have seemingly needed no justification in order to conduct their research” (p. 55).

The indigenous research paradigm is comprised of the following intersecting components. A circle, similar to the representation of the native medicine wheel, is incorporated to represent the holistic and continuous nature of the indigenous research paradigm—all components are “interrelated and . . . each blends into the next” (p. 70). Wilson (2008) introduces the concept of the indigenous research paradigm with clarification of these key components:

- **Indigenous Ontology**—“Reality” for the indigenous ontology is defined by the relationship or set of relationships that one has with the truth. “Thus there is no one definite reality but rather different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous ontology . . . reality is not an object but a process of relationships” (p. 73).
- **Indigenous Epistemology**—Indigenous epistemology is not limited to a way of knowing but includes ways of knowing and the associated relationships. “These relationships are with the cosmos around us, as well as with concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships. Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos” (p. 74). “This is our epistemology. Thinking of the world around us as a web of connections and relationships” (p. 77).
- **Indigenous Axiology**—The foundation of indigenous axiology is relational accountability. “Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy; value judgments lose their meaning” (p. 77). The critical component is the researchers’ accountability to the relationships.
- **Indigenous Methodology**—The integrity of the indigenous methodology is grounded in research that must be “respectful” and “useful” to the indigenous community. “Respect, reciprocity and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology.” (Wilson, 2008, p. 77)

The web of interconnectivity which is characteristic of indigenous research methodology is more applicable to the holistic nature of tribal cultures than Eurocentric methods. Western research paradigms tend to dissect the components of a study and as such are not applicable to studies of Native peoples without some modification to consider cultural aspects. Tribal culture represents webs of interwoven connectivity and no one component is greater than the other. As a Native scholar/researcher, I support the “decolonization” of Western research methodologies applied to the studies of Indigenous peoples.

Smith (1999) asserts,

Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and them coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (p. 39).

This study incorporated some Western research theories and methodologies but the critical component is the addition of tribal culture and heritage positioned at the core of examining the experiences of these American Indian college students at UNC Pembroke.

Indigenous Ontology and Epistemology

Relationship to the Study

As a Native researcher, my interwoven role of American Indian woman, student, educator and advocate perfectly position me in this study of Native students in mainstream higher education. The experiences of American Indian college students in mainstream higher education are representative of a shared relationship particularly with the Native students at UNC Pembroke, my Alma Marta. Wilson (2008) explains that these relationships “from the past, from the present, and from your future . . . is what surrounds us, and what forms us, our world, our cosmos and our reality” (p. 76). The position that I take in this study is defined by the relationships that span the scope of my experiences as an undergraduate student, administrative assistant, graduate student and now as an educator at UNC Pembroke. All these relationships define my existence in higher education, shape my position in this study and represent my perspective of reality—my ontology.

My work experiences at UNC Pembroke provide a lens for viewing mainstream higher education in a manner vastly different from my perceptions as a naïve undergraduate student. For example, I recognize racism and prejudice more readily in its covert forms than I would have during my undergraduate experiences. I ascribe this to the knowledge gained through doctoral research and recognize the level of wisdom acquired with age. Covert racism, in mainstream higher education, manifests in myriad forms to marginalize American Indian students, staff and faculty. On numerous occasions, I have had such experiences. The following recollection is one of numerous I have encountered during my employment at UNCP which represents the connection I establish between ontology and epistemology in this study. In other words, past experiences and relationships define how I perceive mainstream higher education and guide my strategies for navigating the barriers in the academy.

Nine years after my completing my undergraduate degree at Pembroke State University, I was hired in the Department of American Indian Studies as an administrative assistant. I decided to return to the classroom to seek a graduate degree after thirteen years since receiving my Bachelor's. At that time, self-confidence was certainly not one of my dominant traits, so I frequently sought the direction and encouragement of faculty and staff during the application process to graduate school and during the first year of graduate study.

One conversation continues to burn in the depths of my soul as clear as any conversational memory I can recall. As I discussed the Masters of Public Administration program with one of the core faculty in the program, she made a statement to me that

may have been one of the defining moments in my academic career. In one of our many casual conversations, she stated, “As long as you talk like that, you will never complete a Master’s degree program.” She added, “People will assume that you are uneducated when you talk.” The discussion continued with further elaborations regarding the deficiencies of Lumbee students because of their “poor use of the English language.”

Like many faculty who come to our campus, this woman never took the time to be educated through an appreciation of the Lumbee Tribe and our culture. This was painfully evidenced by her unwillingness to recognize the institution is positioned in the heart of one of the largest Lumbee communities in the country and was founded specifically as a teacher training school for American Indians. Her ignorance of the Lumbee culture was the foundation she used to quickly position herself in a status of superiority above these “uneducated Indians.” Interestingly enough if she had taken the time to carefully examine the history of the Lumbee Indian Tribe, she would not be hasty to assign the stereotypical label to me and my People based upon our unique dialect which is certainly contrary to that of her northern, Euro-American ancestry.

William Hazlitt (1778-1830) considered by many as the greatest critics and essayist of the English language said, “Prejudice is the child of ignorance.” Ignorance is the principal platform for discrimination and prejudice in this nation and even in the academy. Stereotypes, couched in racist generalizations of a particular group of people, serve as a driving force to fuel the fire of discrimination plaguing society and the campuses of mainstream colleges and universities. In the twenty-first century, racist Whites are more sophisticated in their actions of discrimination than they were in the

cross-burning days of the Klu Klux Klan, but the damage to subordinate groups can be just as traumatic. This particular event has proven to be a proverbial double-edged sword for me. Despite the pain of the experience, this changed my path forever. This is indeed one of those defining relationships which introduced the realization that mainstream higher education did not accept me, as a Lumbee Indian woman, nor my tribal heritage without some modification to the expected behavior. Sadly, this mirrors the intent of early colonial education systems for American Indians.

Looking White, Talking Indian—Position of Privilege?

Despite growing up in an Indian community, my family did not focus on the value of asserting our “Indianness.” We knew we were Indian so we did not spend time our talking about how tribal heritage would define our position in society. Our oral history includes myriad stories describing the discrimination that my ancestors experienced in Robeson County, North Carolina—the heart of a racist South. A number of my family members are educators and who share similar stories of discrimination in education. The segregated schools for American Indians were substandard and severely underfunded. A retired American Indian school teacher in our community often tells a story of procuring textbooks from the trash dumpsters of the White schools in the midnight hours so that his Indian school children could have updated textbooks. I knew there was prejudice and discrimination in our particular native history, but perhaps surprisingly, I was relatively unaware to any of this despite living in an Indian community and attending predominantly Indian secondary schools after the segregation period.

I do not recall exactly when I realized that I was different—maybe I never considered myself as different from the rest of the Tribe since there are some who look like me. As a child, I recall statements by Indians about other Indians that referenced them as “acting White” or “talking White.” But I never thought that was me—my family was not wealthy and I talked like everyone around me. In retrospect, I know we did not feel inferior to Whites despite their historical attempts to assert their superiority but we did know that our position, as defined by the dominant culture, was considered inferior to Whites.

Johnson (2006) examines the role of privilege and power in perpetuating the continuation of social injustice in our society. The federal recognition process is a perfect example of a systematic construct of power and privilege used to define a group of people. For more than a century, the Lumbee Indian Tribe fights to prove their position as a tribe within a framework devised by non-Indians. Johnson states, “. . . the dominant racial group has the cultural authority to define the boundaries around ‘white’ as it chooses. The same is true with the definition of what is considered ‘normal’” (p. 18). Stereotypes of what defines American Indian marginalize many of us who fail to fit these Eurocentric paradigms of normality.

With fair-skin, strawberry-blonde hair and hazel green eyes, I do not fit the stereotypical image defining the physical appearance of the “typical” Lumbee Indian (i.e. brown skin, dark hair and non-light eyes). My parents and my sister have brown hair and brown eyes but I do resemble my father’s sisters so I simply dismissed the childhood teasing of references to my position in the family as the “milk man’s daughter.” Despite

the teasing, I never felt out of place nor that I did not belong. I never doubted my Lumbee heritage nor did I ever need to defend my appearance to anyone in the Indian community. I certainly never associated my appearance of “Whiteness” with any level of privilege. I would never dishonor my heritage for personal gain.

My first graduate level research study, on Indian gaming, was a very controversial topic in the Lumbee community, particularly, with our efforts for federal recognition. This was the start of my interest in and commitment to an indigenous research agenda, which open the door for writing articles, creating ethnographic films, and presenting my work at national, regional, and state academic conferences. I have continued to pursue an active and ambitious research agenda as I work toward completing the requirements for the Ph.D. at UNC Greensboro (UNCG). Navigating in these academic venues, beyond the comfort of my tribal community, has led to the realization that most people, including many American Indians, do not recognize that I am a Native. I discovered that in these situations, which also included every class at UNCG, I made a concerted effort to declare my tribal heritage early in the encounter. With many responses, “Oh, you don’t *look* Indian,” in my silent thoughts, my counter remark was, “And how do you think Indians should look?” All the while, I knew a fair-skin, strawberry-blonde with what appeared to be a long Southern drawl was certainly not the stereotypical Indian from old western films and television shows. I must add that students and faculty at UNC Greensboro did not engage me in such dialogue but I am nearly certain many must have entertained the thought.

As I reflect on these experiences that extend beyond the familiarity of family and friends who know I am Lumbee and never question my identity, I recall a single encounter with a Tuscarora student in the early months of my employment at UNC Pembroke. “Hunt,” he said questionably as he read the nameplate on my desk. “You must have married a ‘Hunt.’” In abrupt declaration against his bold assumption, I stated, “I’m Lumbee. In fact, my great-grandfather owned the land on which this campus building sits.” Despite the humor with family regarding my fair skin, it was quite frustrating—almost angering—that this stranger assumed my association with the Hunt name could only be limited to a marital connection.

In retrospect, this incident deeply troubled me because I find that I have recanted this particular exchange to others as I share my experiences with prejudice and discrimination. I readily admit that this specific incident was another defining moment in my self-identity because for the first time I realized that my existence as a Native woman would be challenged by many whose notions are positioned within the stereotypical constructs of an individual’s physical appearance—even other Natives who were not familiar with my tribal heritage. I resolved I would never allow myself to fall into this trap again. “I’m Lumbee—I don’t want anyone to think that I’m White.” My desire was to address this issue head-on and one strategy was to wear my Native jewelry which frequently would initiate the “race discussion.”

I consider this a legitimate issue to address not to validate my position as a Native researcher but to use my experiences as a platform to speak to the stereotypes held by mainstream society which often marginalize American Indians and particularly American

Indians, like me, who look White. As a fair-skinned Native woman, I never considered my physical appearance to be an asset for navigating the barriers in society, although this is not completely unheard of in the Lumbee community. A Lumbee woman in my office, who moved back home after many years away from the community, shared stories of fair-skinned Lumbees in her generation who would claim to be White to gain access to better employment opportunities when they moved to other parts of the country during the 1950s. This co-worker, a brown-skinned and black haired Native, admitted that she was not afforded the same opportunities because she could not “pass for White.”

This discussion with my co-worker forced me to consider if my fair skin was indeed a benefit that I never even recognized. My aunt, a retired educator, shares many stories of discrimination from her youth. Her skin tone is of fair complexion and similar to my own. She recalls an experience in a local restaurant when her husband, whose skin is very dark brown, was told that he must enter from the back door but she could use the front entrance. In her outrage, she refused to patronize an establishment with such discriminatory practices.

The question for my aunt and the question for me is—how many doors were opened without hesitation because we do not *look* Indian? That is a difficult thought to entertain as I consider how many doors have been closed to my People due to the color of their skin. Many minorities, who have experienced such blatant discrimination, would consider light skin a benefit and an opportunity for exploitation. But I must ask myself to what extent am I willing to compromise my tribal heritage in order to enter doors that would otherwise be closed to me if my skin had been of darker pigment. I believe there

are advantages in mainstream society for minorities who appear to blend into the dominant culture. Such advantages might include social club and organization acceptance; improved employment opportunities; and economic advantages such as rate-favorable bank loans and mortgages. Such advantages may manifest in opportunities that we may not even realize are inaccessible to our Native brothers and sister because of their outward appearance.

I have personally encountered discrimination at the hands of people who know that I am American Indian, particularly, during my experiences in higher education. Some of these include but are not limited to being passed over for advancement, not afforded the same professional development opportunities offered to other non-Native University faculty, and disparate treatment by academic administrators. These are certainly instances when the same opportunities denied to me have been afforded to my non-Indian colleagues. Even in a society that chastises and potentially penalizes blatant acts of discrimination, prejudice maintains a significant presence in mainstream higher education.

But I believe that in other venues, where the assumption is made that I am White, my outward appearance serves as a disguise that must have on numerous occasions afforded me opportunities that would have otherwise been unavailable to my brown-skinned sisters and brothers. Despite the benefit some would attribute to this characteristic, I believe I am bringing shame to my Tribe when I knowingly pass for White to gain access to opportunities challenging the achievement of my brothers and sisters.

I am not in a position to judge my sisters or brothers for their decision to “pass for White” because in the period referenced, leaving Robeson County was a sacrifice many did not want to make but found it a necessity in order to financially support their families. Despite my experiences with discrimination and prejudice in higher education, I cannot and will not deny my tribal heritage to navigate the obstacles of the dominant culture. Nor will I use my fair skin to exercise any level of privilege associated with this physical feature in the dominant society.

However, some degree of alignment with the expectations of the academy is a strategy that many American Indians must employ in order to climb the ivory tower. Our ancestors may charge us with trying to “pass for White” but I consider this the necessary evil to move to a position in the dominant society where I can be an advocate for my People.

Indigenous Axiology and Methodology

“Insider” Research

Another issue that may raise questions in this study is my position of an “insider” researcher. I identify as an “insider” researcher in two distinct aspects—as an American Indian conducting research in my own tribal community and as a lecturer at UNC Pembroke. The role of insider researcher has the potential for criticism if care is not exercised in the processes necessary to conduct proper and respectful research with one’s own people. Deloria (2009) asserts, “Native academics often find themselves in a double bind, confronting the doubled audiences and structures that originate from work that must

speak both to “home”—often experienced as family, community, or location—and to something that is “not-home”—the media, the academy, non-Native audiences” (p. 546).

This dual role of insider/researcher presents a challenge for Indigenous scholars that non-Native researchers may never encounter in their career. The struggle to balance the obligation of conducting research beneficial to my People while introducing scholarship to meet the expected standards of the mainstream academy is representative of the holistic nature of tribal heritage—the connectivity associated with the individual, family, and career is a constant bond. My survival in mainstream higher education has been contingent upon my ability to sustain a manageable balance between the divergent paths of my tribal culture and the ideologies of the academy.

“Without doubt, Native people who are close to their traditions ‘see’ the world differently from non-Indians and even Indians who are not close to their tribal traditions” (Fixico, 2009, p. 554). I believe my tribal culture defines my perceptions of mainstream higher education and the world but as a researcher I must recognize the beliefs and values of those in the study. To allow my own perceptions to cloud the truth in interpretation is a dishonor to my People and a disgrace to my position as a Native scholar. The fact is that my tribal culture interwoven with my educational background serve to guide the questions and inquires of this study. Despite some level of connectivity of shared beliefs among all tribal nations, to presume that all American Indians, even those within the same tribe, share identical perspectives, values and traditions is an erroneous assumption and will certainly result in research that is not credible nor of value to Native people.

Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) state, “Qualitative research, and especially ethnography, relies on what we, as observers, see and what we are told by the participants in our research studies. This is not always a seamless path” (p. 163). The “insider” researcher must navigate the challenges associated with shared experiences of the study participants. Shared experiences are beneficial in building rapport with research participants but it is critical that I avoid making generalized assumptions based on my own experiences and preconceived notions regarding mainstream higher education.

As previously noted, indigenous ontology and epistemology center on associated relationships and accountability to these relationships is the focus of the indigenous axiology and methodology. The most significant role of the researcher is the accountability to the research participants. Wilson (2008) asserts, “[T]he Indigenous researcher has a vested interest in the integrity of the methodology (respectful) and the usefulness of the results if they are to be of any use in the Indigenous community (reciprocity)” (p. 77). The axiology of the Indigenous researcher requires accountability to the relationships necessary for conducting the study. Wilson (2008) describes this concept as “relational accountability” (p. 99).

[R]ather than the goals of validity and reliability, research from an Indigenous paradigm should aim to be authentic or credible. By that I mean that the research must accurately reflect and build upon the relationships between the ideas and the participants. The analysis must be true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by the researcher and the participants alike. (Wilson, 2008, p. 101)

Conducting research in my tribal community and as a faculty member at UNCP, I have considered the importance of this study to my Native people and to our campus with the

recent charge of improving retention and graduation rates across the UNC system. Likewise, my charge to attend to the relational accountability is the overriding responsibility in my role as a Native researcher.

Innes (2009), a Plains Cree member of Cowessess First Nation, discusses the challenges of conducting research with his Native people. Innes positioned himself as an insider/outsider researcher because of his membership in the tribe, although he was reared outside the reservation and his role as a researcher in this tribal community. Despite his membership in the tribe, Innes recognized that he must follow proper protocol for conducting research in a tribal community. For example, his first step was to gain approval of the chief and council before conducting research on the reservation but as noted this did not secure his “insider” status with the tribe. In his account of the first interview session, he describes the uncomfortable phase of the session when one of the elders attempts to validate his association with the tribe. “Wait a second. Who are you anyways? Where’re you from?” (p. 455). This practice is common in the Lumbee community. Strangers begin conversations with a similar question—”Who’s your People?” This question is necessary to validate kinship that will later lead to the trust that is necessary to conduct research in a tribal community. As reflected in Innes’s (2009) experience with his tribe, the self-ascribed role of insider researcher does not automatically secure and validate one’s position as researcher in an Indian community.

Methods of Inquiry for this Study

Goal of the Study

One significant drawback in utilizing quantitative studies exclusively in research to examine the experiences of American Indian college students is that these statistical analyses exclude the voice of Native students, which are critical elements to adequately conduct indigenous educational research. As previously noted, there has been a history of the misrepresentation of Native cultures with the exclusion of indigenous voices in educational research studies. For this study, data from the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE) serves as the springboard to questions that will be addressed through a qualitative inquiry with Native students. Quantitative data will be used to provide an overall picture of the current enrollment of the Native students at UNCP during this study and will also serve as another supplemental data source for this study. These quantitative data, from the UNCP Office of Institutional Effectiveness, include academic intake variables (e.g. high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, high school class ranking, etc.) and data on their current standing at the institution (e.g. current GPA, resident status, FASFA applicant, etc.). Talking Circle discussions (focus group sessions) with American Indian students at UNC Pembroke were the primary data source for this research and the NSSE and student specific enrollment data serve as a secondary data source for reference. The NSSE data are cohort-based data (i.e. no record level data is accessible for the individual students).

Based on Tinto's basic notion of student persistence, a positive correlation is theorized to exist between the level of engagement on the college campus and student

enrollment persistence. The goal of this study is to examine the engagement characteristics of Native students enrolled at UNCP within a conceptual framework designed by establishing correlations between the select NSSE items and Tinto's (1993) three stages of the college career as follows:

- **Stage 1—Separation:** The individual must disconnect from past communities such as family connections, local high school association, and community of residence;
- **Stage 2—Transition:** This represents the phase between separation from old norms and values and complete adoption of the new norms and values associated with the new setting, and;
- **Stage 3—Incorporation:** Represented by full integration into the campus setting—full transition from one community to another.

Based on this goal, I propose the following research question for examination and suggest these associated research hypotheses:

Research Question: Does Tinto's Interactionalist's theory serve as an appropriate model for gauging the persistence behavior of American Indian college students in mainstream higher education?

H₁: Tinto's theory does not apply to American Indian students attending a predominantly White institution geographically located in a tribal community.

H₂: The engagement patterns for American Indian students enrolled at UNCP are dissimilar to those of their peers enrolled when comparing the retention and graduation

rates of Native students at UNC Pembroke to national retention and graduation rates of Indian students.

H₃: Evidence of tribal culture on the campus of UNCP may be a contributing factor to the success of Native students as evidenced in retention and graduation rates above the national rates.

Study Approval

Since this study was conducted with a group of students outside the UNC Greensboro student population, the UNCG Institutional Review Board (IRB) required an approval letter from the UNCP Institutional Review Board as a component of the full application packet to UNCG IRB. The protocol for UNCP IRB approval was a complete application delineating the details of the study. Approval was acquired from the UNCP IRB and the required letter to document this approval was attached to the full application to the UNCG IRB Office. The UNCG IRB requires that each student researcher, conducting studies with human subjects, successfully complete an online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course before IRB approval will be granted for such a study. All requirements were completed and UNC Pembroke (IRB Protocol #: 11-06-001) and UNC Greensboro (Approved Study # 11-0265) granted IRB approval before the contact data for the study population was requested from the UNCP Office of Institutional Research.

Study Participants—American Indian Students

The sample population for this study includes full-time American Indian students enrolled during the fall 2011 semester at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

The data request to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at UNC Pembroke included a list of the full-time American Indian/Alaska Native students classified as seniors.

Students under the age of 18 years old were not included in this study to avoid any issues associated with conducting research with minors. Transfer students were also excluded from this sample because preconceived notions based on comparisons with the transfer institution may often taint their interpretation of campus life. Graduate students were not included in this study because of the different nature of their experiences in higher education. Although, there may be similarities in experiences with prejudice and discrimination, this study focuses on the early stages of higher education as representative in the undergraduate experience. Additionally, the experiences of transfer and graduate students are best examined separately from undergraduates. The UNCP Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided a list of sixty-eight American Indian students with their addresses who met the aforementioned criteria for this study. This sample of twelve students did not include any students of Alaska Native heritage.

Data Collection and Analysis

American Indian Student Voices

Talking Circle discussions (focus group sessions) serve as the qualitative component of this study and function as the primary data source. This list of 68 American Indian seniors received an email invitation to participate in Talking Circle discussions. The email invitation included my affiliation to the study, contact information, IRB approval code, purpose of the study, and expectations for the study participants. The email invitation included a URL to a brief survey, developed with *SurveyMonkey*®,

requesting the contact information of the students interested in participating in the survey. As students indicated an interest, their names were removed from the overall sample listserv and the remaining students received weekly email reminders to encourage their participation in the study.

A scheduling email was sent to these students for the purpose of arranging days/times for the Talking Circle sessions. The scheduling email also included the consent form for their initial review and the following modified version of the interview protocol, based on Tinto's (1993) three-stage model, was provided to give the students an idea of the topics that would guide, not control, the discussions:

SEPARATION

- Let's discuss your connections to family, high school friends and community during your time at UNCP;
- Describe the correlations between your tribal culture (personal belief/values) and the values associated with the UNCP campus community.

TRANSITION

- Describe the adjustment to the culture of college life in terms of the following:
 - Academics
 - Social
 - Procedural
 - Cultural

INCORPORATION

- Talk about your experiences at UNCP—
 - If the diversity at UNCP differs from that of your high school, describe your experiences with students/faculty from diverse backgrounds or have you managed to remain in groups of students like you.

- Describe your level of involvement on the campus compared to your involvement in high school. More or less and why?
- Would you consider a period of adjustment was necessary from high school to college and if yes, what factors are associated with this “transition?” And if no, what factors allowed the seamless transition from high school to college.
- Describe the ways in which UNCP supports your tribal culture and if you do not feel your culture is valued, let’s talk about those reasons.

These questions were not aimed to manipulate the sessions in any way but were necessary to direct the students toward these particular areas for the purpose of examining their experiences within the framework of Tinto’s work. The questions listed above were utilized in each session to ensure the general topics would be covered in every Talking Circle session given the students would participate in one 60-90 minute meeting.

Talking Circles Defined

In keeping with American Indian tradition, Talking Circle methodology will be utilized in this study to facilitate focus group sessions for the qualitative component of this research. Like many tribal ceremonies, there are many variations to the components of the process but the common theme of Talking Circle discussions is the equality of each member and to honor the person who is speaking. In indigenous communities, a circle symbolizes the holistic nature of tribal existence, culture, and life itself. In the circle, all participants are equal—no one is more or less important than the other. The leader will begin the discussion to define the topic and the discussion will begin clockwise—giving each person as much time as necessary to share.

Wilson and Wilson (2000) explain some of the components that tribes elect to incorporate in the use of the Talking Circle:

Typically, group members sit in a circle that represents the holism of Mother Earth and the equality of all members. In some circles an eagle feather or other sacred object is passed around, following the direction of the sun. In other groups a stone is passed from speaker to speaker, symbolizing the connection among group members and to the guiding spirit. The holder of the object speaks “from the heart” and the group listens silently and non-judgmentally until the speaker is finished. Each member is given a chance to speak. A common rule of circle work is that members must not speak out of turn. In most instances, a complete talking circle comprises four rounds, although time restraints, rules and norms vary with each group. Most important is that group members feel ownership of these rules. (p. 11)

Becker, Affonso, and Blue Horse Beard (2006) add, “The Talking Circles application to focus group methodology provide culturally rich group discussions, because the circles bring forth conversations and stories about how a participant thinks and feels . . .” (p. 29).

In the Lumbee community, some of the traditions such as smudging (burning sage) and using an eagle feather are not incorporated in Talking Circle groups and therefore were not utilized with these particular sessions. Each Talking Circle session consists of 2-4 students to ensure comfort level among the participants. Each student participated in one Talking Circle session as every session incorporated the same scripted questions to guide the discussions. During the Talking Circle sessions, students were reminded of their right to decide to discontinue in the process at any time.

The primary location of these sessions was the Native American Resource Center on the UNCP campus. The main concern was to develop a schedule and select a location that was most convenient for the students and for this reason, one of the sessions was

held in a meeting area on the second floor from the Native American Resource Center and another session was held in a small conference room in the Education Center—a location also on the UNCP campus but more convenient for this particular group of students. All sessions were 60-90 minutes in length and a digital recorder was used to record these sessions.

The protocol for each Talking Circle session was followed identically, in that, each meeting started with a brief overview of the research study and my culturally-based reasons for engaging in this particular inquiry—my intent to contribute an issue of substance to the conversations surrounding the factors attributing to the educational attainment for our People. Clarity of my position in this study and my standing in the Lumbee community served to elevate self-disclosure of the student participants. Establishing rapport among the participants included a time for each student to share a brief introduction that provided their name, major course of study, and any personal information they wished to share. The questions previously discussed in this section guided each Talking Circle session to maintain consistency of the general topics explored. At the close of each session, I shared the process for their review of their particular transcribed comments. Every effort was employed to ensure consistency in each session since the participants would attend one single 60-90 minute Talking Circle session.

As a Native researcher, I believe it dishonors the Talking Circle participants to take field notes during the discussions. For this reason, the initial process of data analysis was conducted immediately after each session for the purpose of recording field notes

during the first round of reviewing the audio recordings. The free online software, *Audacity*®, was used to transfer the digital audio files from the recorder to an electronic format for use in the qualitative data analysis software, *Atlas.ti*®. This process actually served as the introductory review of each session to examine the quality of each recording. The recordings will remain on the recorder in a locked file cabinet in my office and will be deleted upon completion of this project.

Within 24 hours of each session, I reviewed the uploaded audio files in *Atlas.ti*® and conducted initial coding in the system. This process entailed listening to each student comment, assigning the initial code to the comment segment and labeling the coded comment with the primary document position code, date of the session, and special alphabetic identifier for each student. Throughout the transcripts, these alphabetic identifiers will reference students but the session notes indicate the pseudonym by which the student will be referenced in association with their quotations.

Further note taking, in the form of reflexive memos in *Atlas.ti*®, remained part of the entire process. This initial coding process continued until all sessions were reviewed and each relevant student comment had been assigned an initial code. The next phase of the process involved an examination of the initial codes to determine positions where collapsing codes was necessary. This segment of the process allowed for the process of creating code families for further organizing the initial codes as developed in the early stages of review. The literature review and other associated journal articles were also uploaded as primary documents into the hermeneutic unit (HU) in *Atlas.ti*® and relevant segments were coded as well. This software is particularly useful for qualitative

researchers to refer to all sources of data within the context of each code family and subsequent codes, which is an excellent way to maintain a research project within the constraints of a single location.

The student comments were then transcribed by each code. This was by far the most time consuming and labor intensive step in this process—the actual verbatim transcription of each relevant student comment in every Talking Circle session. It was imperative to listen carefully and type every word of each student comment. To honor the voice of the students, each and every word was typed within the dialect spoken by each student and this proved to be a challenge because although, I am accustomed to speaking in my tribal dialect, it was a new process to type it but I moved past that discomfort to a transcribed document of each student comment.

Validity and Reliability

Native scholars challenge the application of Western research methodologies that maintain parameters within the context of validity, reliability, statistically significant, right or wrong. As previously referenced, Wilson (2008) defines indigenous research methodologies in the following manner, “Respect, reciprocity and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology” (p. 77). As a Native scholar, the process of honoring and respecting the voices of these students was always at the forefront of this project. Compromising the words of these students was never entertained—it was always expressed that their words would be represented exactly within the context and spirit they intended.

As such, the next phase of this process was to comprise a document for each student that included the transcribed comments from the sessions in which they participated. These documents were emailed to each student and they were invited to provide feedback on the transcriptions and to validate the responses. As students in mainstream higher education, we all find that we have been inculcated to the notions that our Lumbee dialect is wrong, improper and should be corrected. For this reason, the email to each student included a caveat to request that they avoid modification of their comments to adjust for “proper grammar.” Most students referenced being chastised for writing the way they spoke—some even referenced receiving papers covered in red pen. I reminded the participants that our Lumbee dialect is part of our heritage and that it was important that it be preserved to provide a proper representation of their tribal culture for this project. I made a point to conclude with the following statement—“Der’s no red pens gonna to touch deese comments!”

The final product will be shared with each student so they may see their comments within the context of the entire document. Indigenous research methodologies would maintain this circular approach to educational research—respecting the value of the participant throughout the process. The Native researcher understands the value of reciprocity—not simply conducting research in the tribal community and leaving. It honors indigenous ways of knowing to involve the participants throughout the research process to ensure they are properly represented from start to finish.

Validity and reliability, in terms of the project, represents my commitment to represent these students within the exact spirit they intend and involve them in the

process of making certain their true voices are heard. Examining and re-examining the code families and subsequent codes within the process of hearing the voices over and over again validated the correlation between the codes assigned to each student comment.

Consideration of Human Subjects

All email correspondence to the students included information to clearly outline the purpose and the procedures associated with this study. Also included was information to delineate any potential benefits/risks/costs associated with participation and directions for any associated questions. Students were informed at each phase of the interview of their right to discontinue participation in the study at any time without question and penalty. Talking Circle participants received a copy of the consent forms in the scheduling emails and paper copies were reviewed and signed at the start of each group session. The signed copies remain in a locked file cabinet in my campus office. All subjects were assured of the anonymity of their comments.

Confidentiality

It was my initial intent that an outside individual would assist in the transcribing of the audio files from the Talking Circle sessions. However, early into the interview sessions and based on the sensitive nature of some of the discussions, I decided to transcribe the audio sessions myself and therefore maintain the anonymity of each participant. The labor intensive process of transcribing the session audio actually proved most beneficial to my emergence into the data from the discussions which would not have happened if I had included another person to perform this task for me.

It was not necessary to devise a complex schematic for keeping the name of the students confidential. It turned out that more than half of the students were either students that I knew from the community already or students I had taught during their first or second year at UNCP. After the first review of each audio recording, I realized that I did not have any trouble recognizing which student was speaking so the alphabetic identifier associated with each student was sufficient for the coded audio comments of each student and the transcribed files for student review. The audio recordings in which students may have stated their names remain in a locked file cabinet in my office and will be destroyed at such time that this project is complete.

A data file was compiled of each student's transcribed comments and emailed to their provided email address to request their review. Students were also provided the opportunity to expand on any topic they deemed necessary. All were pleased with the precise manner in which their comments were presented. No one wished to add to the transcribed material. As previously noted, each student was assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of using his or her comments in the final draft of this project.

Securing Data

The information to identify the students on the digital recordings was kept separate from the information necessary to contact students for follow-up sessions. Pseudonym associations with the student identity was kept secure and separate from the audio data during the research and destroyed thereafter. The data was not uploaded on any public computers, sent as an email attachment, nor stored on shared drives on the

campus server. The data was stored on a USB drive and secured safely in a locked office file cabinet when not in use.

Practical Application of this Study

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, a Native American-serving institution, was awarded a NASNTI (Native American Serving non-tribal Institutions) Grant from the United States Department of Education with a component for developing programs to assist transfer students with their transition to the host institution—particularly American Indian students. Although the study participants are not transfer students, I believe the findings of this research will yield a body knowledge relevant on certain levels to all American Indian undergraduate students. The implications of this study may indeed yield wide range application to the development of culturally responsive programs on our campus and collaborative programs with our local feeder community college campuses as well.

American Indian students have the potential to be successful in mainstream higher education when their tribal culture is acknowledged, respected, and supported. How does one define success in higher education? For this study, success is defined in terms of persistence and completion to degree attainment. Institutions that implement academic and social support programs with tribal culture at the core will witness an increase in the retention and graduation rates of their Native students.

Despite our history as a Native American-serving institution, I believe that UNC Pembroke certainly has room for improvement in our endeavors to honor the mission intended by our ancestors. This process begins with educating non-Natives in the value of

honoring and respecting tribal culture. It is my hope that this research will contribute to the knowledge base dedicated to educating non-Indians in the destructive nature of these assimilative systems that define mainstream education for American Indian students.

CHAPTER IV

THE STUDENT POPULATION AT UNC PEMBROKE

Incorporating the Quantitative Perspective

This section serves to validate the incorporation of a quantitative representation of the Native student population at UNC Pembroke in this study. The widely accepted method of informed decision-making at the federal, state and local levels incorporates the use and leverage of quantitative data analysis in the process of developing and evaluating policies, programs, and procedures. In the realm of higher education, quantitative data is the most frequently employed method to drive operational and strategic decision-making. For this study, the quantitative profile of Native students at UNCP serves as the point of first departure to begin this discussion of, if and perhaps, how or why American Indian students at this institution challenge the national data representing the retention and graduation rates of their Native peers.

Quantitative data are significant to educational research because this avenue positions the researcher to frame inquiry to examine the “what” questions underlying certain collective social phenomenon and behaviors. Alternately, the qualitative component—the focus of this particular study examines the “why” phenomenon from the perspective of the individual. Qualitative inquiry provides the depth and breadth of insight more useful in determining matters of “practical” significance as opposed to “statistical” significance. Data collected via qualitative methodologies is also of

significantly greater utility in understanding the “how” of individual concept and behavior formation.

UNCP—A Picture of Multiculturalism

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, located in the largest Lumbee community in the United States, has received many notable awards and distinctions. Among these, *U.S. News & World Report*, for a number of years, has described the institution as the “most diverse campus in the South.” As illustrated in Table 2 below, more than half of the overall campus enrollment of full time and part time students self-identified as a minority for the fall 2011 semester. The total number of students enrolled at UNC Pembroke during the fall 2011 semester was 6,251 (4,546 full time and 1,705 part time). White (Non-Hispanic) students represent less than half of the fulltime (40 percent) and part time (47 percent) enrollments at UNC Pembroke. More than one third (33 percent) of full time students are African-American. There are 986 full time and part time students who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. Despite this slight reduction in the American Indian headcount from fall 2010 semester, the proportion of overall student enrollment remains approximately 16 percent.

Table 2

UNCP Total Student Headcount by Race/Ethnicity—Fall 2011 Semester

Ethnicity	Fulltime		Part time		Total Students	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
African American	1478	33	404	24	1882	30
American Indian/Alaskan Native	634	14	352	21	986	16
Asian	90	2	23	1	113	2

Table 2 (cont.)

Ethnicity	Fulltime		Part time		Total Students	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Hispanics of any race	207	5	47	3	254	4
Nonresident Alien	69	2	15	1	84	1
Two or more races	96	2	28	2	124	2
Unknown	149	3	39	2	188	3
White, Non-Hispanic	1819	40	797	47	2616	42
All Students	4546	100	1705	100	6251	100

Source: UNC Pembroke Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Special Request Report, Fall 2011

UNCP Students and Academics

The data in Table 3 are a representation of the student enrollment by race/ethnicity at UNCP in the fall 2011 semester. The first column provides the average overall GPA for the students enrolled during this semester. International students (Nonresident Aliens) carry the highest overall grade point average (3.24) of any racial/ethnic group enrolled at UNCP during fall 2011. African American students, with the highest full time minority enrollment on the campus, have the lowest GPA (2.61) among all racial/ethnic groups. White (Non-Hispanic) students, who constitute 40 percent of the overall full time enrollment on the campus, have the second highest overall GPA (3.10). Trailing just behind are Hispanics (2.85) and American Indians/Alaskan Natives (2.81) within a quarter of a percentage point and less respectively.

Table 3**UNCP Academic Intake and Current Standing Data by Race/Ethnicity—Fall 2011 Semester**

Race	Overall GPA	HS GPA	SAT
African American	2.61	3.16	900
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2.81	3.29	920
Asian	2.94	3.22	901
Hispanics of any race	2.85	3.29	936
Nonresident alien	3.24	3.40	980
Two or more races	2.83	3.36	963
Unknown	2.64	3.16	920
White, Non-Hispanic	3.10	3.30	954

Source: UNC Pembroke Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Special Request Report, Fall 2011

For the purpose of this particular study, academic intake data will represent the overall average high school grade point average (GPA) of the students referenced in this section (i.e. all students enrolled at UNCP in the fall 2011 semester) and the overall average SAT scores as reported at the time of admission to the institution. Consistent with the current overall GPA as reported in the previous section, international students (Nonresident Aliens) were admitted to UNCP with the highest mean high school GPA (3.40) and SAT scores (980) among all other racial/ethnic groups. White students were admitted with a mean overall high school GPA of 3.30 and 954 for the overall mean SAT score. Within a fraction of their GPA are American Indian/Alaskan Native and Hispanic students—both groups with a mean high school GPA of 3.29 at the time of college admission. It should be noted that the mean SAT scores for American Indian/Alaskan

Native students are significantly lower than those of Hispanics. African American and Asian students are admitted with the lowest mean SAT scores (900/901) of any other racial/ethnic group. Perhaps the low mean SAT scores of American Indian/Alaskan Native students and their minority peers may in fact be partially attributable to cultural and statistical bias inherent in the SAT and ACT. Freedle (2003) argues for a corrective scoring method to address the nonrandom ethnic test bias patterns found in the SAT and other standardized tests.

For the purpose of discussing this quantitative data set, comparisons and references were not made to the groups of students who self-identified as “unknown” or “two or more races.” This certainly does not negate nor ignore the value of multiracial students at the institution nor does it invalidate or devalue the right of any student to choose not to associate with any particular racial/ethnic group by selecting “unknown” on their admissions application. These two groups of students represent five percent (5%) of the overall student population enrolled at UNCP during this particular semester. The vague categorization of “two or more races” can represent any number of combinations that may include but are not limited to those students with parents of African American, White, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native and other racial/ethnic groups that may have not been listed.

Examining Retention and Graduation Rates

The Office of Institutional Research and Analysis at the University of North Carolina General Administration provides statistical data pertaining to the sixteen campuses of the UNC System. Retention and graduation rates categorized in terms of

racial/ethnic groups are among the plethora of data available to the public on the General Administration website.

Retention and graduation rates are the customary factors in the assessment of student success in higher education. Stakeholders require a data-driven system to validate the work of colleges and universities. As such, the general public demands accountability and pressure by regional and disciplinary-specific accrediting agencies. To date, the revised funding formula for public colleges and universities is tied to retention and graduation rates. The consensus of the higher education community is that these data serve as proper indicators of academic achievement but there are some important caveats that often escape these discussions.

First retention and graduation rates are not proxies for institutional quality. There are myriad erroneous assumptions relating to institutional retention and graduation rates. It blindly and errantly assumes that all students who enroll fulltime in college (1) intend to graduate from that particular institution, (2) intend to earn a four year degree, or (3) intend to maintain continuous, full-time enrollment. Despite these flaws, retention and graduation rates remain the principle and most widely utilized measures of institutional “quality” and student “engagement” in high education and if I intend to compare my research to that in the arena of public opinion, these data serve as an appropriate format for comparative purposes. For the purpose of this study, retention and graduation rates and the level of engagement of American Indian students at UNCP will serve as the factors which partially represent success for this group of college students. These data include institution-specific rates as well as system-wide rates. Retention data are not a

depiction of all enrolled students but those first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates who first matriculated at one of the UNC System institutions.

Table 4 reflects four consecutive years (2000-2004) of cohort survival data for first-time full-time, Bachelor's Degree seeking freshman at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. The data include the first-year retention rates, 4-year graduation rates and 6-year graduation rates for the four largest racial/ethnic groups at the institution.

Table 4 encompasses a period of time in which UNC Pembroke, along with six other sister universities (ECSU, FSU, NC A&T, NCCU, WCU and WSSU), were designated by the UNC General Administration to be an *Enrollment Growth* institution in the system. For the purpose of normalizing the System's enrollment funding formula, these seven institutions each with overall enrollments below 6,000 students, were charged with meeting ambitious growth targets in undergraduate and graduate enrollments. The North Carolina General Assembly appropriated \$25 million in special recurring funds to create improvements in the overall infrastructure to support the increased student enrollment of the institutions (UNC Board of Governors, 2005). As aside note, a proportion of funding to institutions of higher education in North Carolina is based on enrollment headcount and semester credit hours generated and to date, retention and graduation rates are now a component of that funding formula.

In the fall 1999 semester, the enrollment for UNCP was 3,062 and in fall 2005, the campus had grown to 5,632—an increase of near 84 percent (UNC Board of Governors, 2005). As previously mentioned, the enrollment in fall 2011 (6,251) which actually represents the first significant decrease in enrollment since our induction as an

Enrollment Growth institution—a 10 percent decrease in enrollment from fall 2010 (6,944). At this date, the UNC system-wide strategic plan has redirected the focus of enrollment growth to a more direct agenda on institutional performance relative to student retention and graduation rates.

Table 4

UNCP Cohort Survival Data (2000-2004)

Race/Ethnicity	Number in Class 2000	2001 1Yr Retention	2004 4Yr Graduation	2006 6Yr Graduation
African American	104	76.0%	20.0%	44.0%
American Indian	123	74.0	20.0	37.0
Hispanic	15	73.0	13.0	27.0
White	307	64.0	21.0	37.0
Race/Ethnicity	Number in Class 2001	2002 1Yr Retention	2005 4Yr Graduation	2007 6Yr Graduation
African American	146	79.0%	18.0%	37.0%
American Indian	134	76.0	9.0	36.0
Hispanic	17	71.0	24.0	41.0
White	378	69.0	15.0	32.0
Race/Ethnicity	Number in Class 2002	2003 1Yr Retention	2006 4Yr Graduation	2008 6Yr Graduation
African American	131	82.0%	15.0%	48.0%
American Indian	123	77.0	16.0	37.0
Hispanic	18	50.0	11.0	22.0
White	413	60.0	13.0	29.0
Race/Ethnicity	Number in Class 2003	2004 1Yr Retention	2007 4Yr Graduation	2009 6Yr Graduation
African American	154	75.0%	13.0%	34.0%
American Indian	125	78.0	22.0	42.0
Hispanic	18	50.0	11.0	22.0
White	461	63.0	16.0	32.0

Source: UNC General Administration Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, Retention, Graduation, and Persistence Rates of First-Time Full-Time Freshmen, 2000-2003.

During the time period denoted in Table 4, American Indian students represent the largest racial/ethnic group presence on the UNCP campus. In the first column of Table 4, the cohort headcount is listed for each racial/ethnic group. The next column to the right represents the percentage of students from each respective cohort who returned in the fall semester of the next year after their initial enrollment. The next two columns, as denoted, are the 4-year and 6-year graduation rates for each cohort.

The one-year retention rates for White students are approximately 70 percent each year. In 2003 and 2004 approximately half of the Hispanic cohorts returned the next fall following their admission. On average, more than 75 percent of American Indian students returned for their sophomore year and this percentage is slightly higher (78 percent) for African American students. Four-year graduation rates for all cohorts represents are relatively low when compared to six-year graduation rates. In 2005, the four year graduation rate for Hispanic students may represent the highest percentage (24 percent) but this figure calculates to approximately four of the 17 students in the cohort. Similarly, 22 percent 4-year graduation rate for American Indians in 2007 equates approximately 27 students of the 125 in the cohort. With the exception of the 2000 UNCP cohort of Native students, four-year graduation rates for American Indian students are consistent with their peers and two of the cohorts have 4-year rates higher than White students. For three of the four years listed, African American cohorts have the highest 6-year graduation rates. The 2002 cohort of American Indian students has the highest 6-year graduation rates of all their peers who completed their degree programs in 2009. The overall generalization

gleaned from these data is that American Indian students at UNC Pembroke are retained and graduate at rates consistent or higher than their peers at the same institution.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

As cited in the literature on college retention and graduation trends, Tinto (1993) is frequently referenced for his theory that a direct correlation exists between engagement and persistence. In this section, Tables 4.4 and 4.5 represent NSSE Benchmark Comparisons requested to examine the engagement patterns of Native students at UNCP in comparison to their peers.

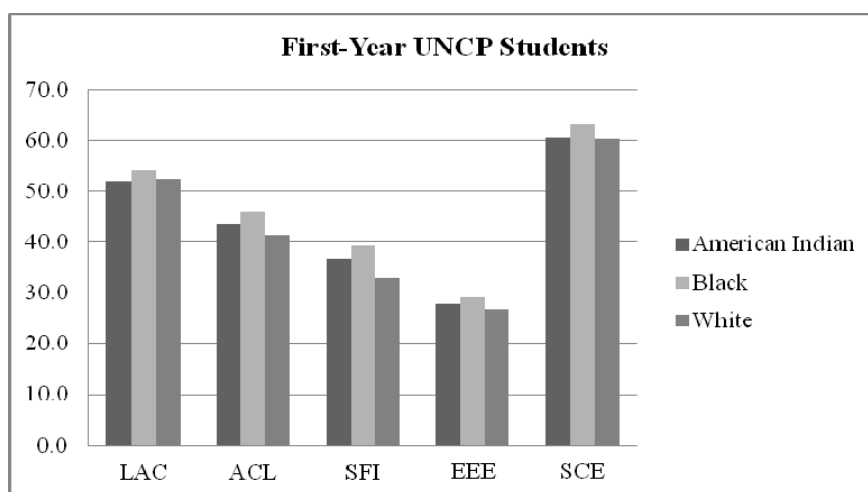
In the spring semester of 2008, American Indian college freshman ($n = 130$) and continuing seniors ($n = 119$) at UNCP completed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The origins of this instrument stem from conversations of The National Education Goals Panel in the early 1990s that centered on how to promote the measurement and use of best practices in teaching and learning (Kuh, 2001). Nevitt Sanford, Alexander Astin, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson are among the forerunners in this discussion of college student engagement. NSSE has created the following five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice as discussed in Chapter three:

- Level of Academic Challenge (LAC),
- Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL),
- Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI),
- Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE),
- Supportive Campus Environment (SCE)

Scores on each benchmark range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating a greater level of engagement specific to the benchmark. There is an ongoing debate with regard to the difficulty of making inner-institutional comparisons based solely on the quantitative output measures in the NSSE. For example, there is great inherent difficulty in comparing the engagement characteristics of a first semester freshman attending a large public research university than that of a peer attending a small private religious institution. This is a classic example of practical significance outweighing the import of statistical relevance. However, the data representing the engagement of Native students at UNCP is encouraging for campus administration because it speaks to the quality of services and programs that foster engagement for all students not only the target population of this NSSE Grand Analysis.

In order to measure the engagement patterns of students among ethnic groups it is important to assess the net gain from the freshman year to the senior year. For the purpose of comparing engagement patterns among ethnic groups, one should examine the data representing the senior year to assess differences among ethnic groups. In Figure 3, based upon the NSSE results, American Indian students are generally engaged at the same level as their White peers. Black students are engaged at higher levels than their peers in all represented racial categories. The benchmark, Enriching Educational Experience (EEE), has the lowest level of engagement for all ethnic groups for the freshman year. This may be attributed to the notion that freshman students are not typically involved in the activities that define this benchmark until their junior or senior years. Some of these include but are not limited to field-experience, internships,

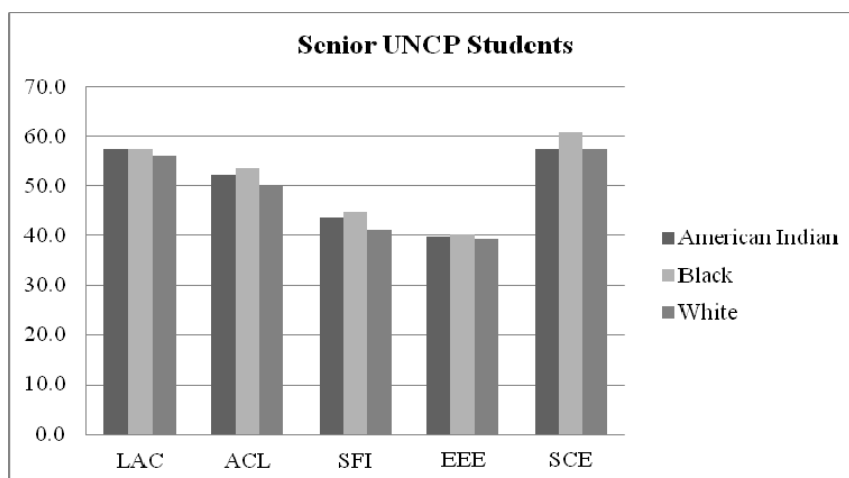
community service, formal learning communities, study abroad and other related co-curricular.



Source: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). (2009). American Indian (AI) Grand Analysis Benchmark Comparisons. Special Report for UNC Pembroke.

Figure 3. 2009 NSSE American Indian Grand Analysis First-Year UNCP Students

As represented in Figure 4, American Indian students at UNCP exhibit a level of engagement higher than that of their White peers to the senior year except in the category of Supportive Campus Environment (SCE). At this benchmark, the reported experiences of White students (57.6) rank only slightly above those of American Indian students (57.4). Black students continue to rank slightly above both their American Indian and White peers in every category except Level of Academic Challenge (LAC). At this level, American Indian seniors rank slightly above their Black (57.3) and White (56.0) peers.



Source: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). (2009). American Indian (AI) Grand Analysis Benchmark Comparisons. Special Report for UNC Pembroke.

Figure 4. 2009 NSSE American Indian Grand Analysis Senior UNCP Students

Aligning Quantitative Data with Tinto's Assertions

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) releases a congressionally mandated annual report, *The Condition of Education*, which incorporates the most recent statistical data to track developments and trends in education. One troubling trend in postsecondary education is the underrepresentation of Native students. American Indian/Alaska Native students have the lowest percentage of enrollment and graduation rates among all other ethnic/racial groups in the United States. In 2008-2009, degree-granting institutions conferred more than 1.6 million Bachelor's degrees of which less than one percent were awarded to American Indian/Alaska Native students (Aud et al., 2011, p. 236). Based on the American Indian student data at UNC Pembroke as previously discussed, a positive correlation does exist between the engagement patterns of Native students at UNCP and their retention and graduation rates.

Examining the condition of American Indian education from a national perspective paints a grim picture for tribal communities. However, the quantitative representation of Native students at UNC Pembroke is a more positive representation of American Indians in higher education in terms of engagement, retention and graduation at mainstream institutions. From a national perspective, Indian students rank among the lowest ethnic groups in these categories but at UNCP, Native students are equivalent to their non-Native peers and in some instances rank higher than their non-Native peers. This validates an examination of the experiences of American Indian students at UNC Pembroke.

The challenge in researching Native college students from a strict, quantitative perspective is that data do not provide that critical element which is most relative to the study of indigenous populations—the voice of the Indian student. Certainly attitudinal data on student satisfaction and needs may partially explain retention and attrition behavior but unless these instruments are developed within the context of tribal culture and heritage, an accurate representation of the true feelings and attitudes of American Indian students may be lost in the Eurocentric design of the assessment tool. In this next section, I will introduce thus far the most viable element to this research—the voices of American Indian students at UNCP.

Talking Circle Discussions

Introduction to the Process

As defined in the literature review of this study, the Talking Circle concept is a form of focus group discussions employed in American Indian communities. To honor

the traditional practices of the Lumbee Tribe, the focus group sessions of this study, a term identified in Eurocentric research methodology, will be characterized as Talking Circle sessions or Talking Circle discussions. It is important to employ indigenous research methodologies in the field of American Indian education for the purpose of bringing respect and honor to the tribal culture and heritage of Native communities. For this reason, indigenous research methodologies will serve to “decolonize” the Western research models historically utilized to examine the experiences of Native Peoples in mainstream educational systems.

Within the first week of the initial email invitation, only eight students had responded indicating their willingness to participate in the sessions. The initial email contact was followed by weekly emails to the email listserv of students minus those who had previously indicated their willingness to participate. As the sessions were arranged, I shared with students the difficulty with gaining an adequate response rate with the sample population. The consensus of the participants was that email correspondence was not the appropriate method for contacting college students today. Interestingly, discussions with other faculty across the campus indicated a similar conclusion.

During the follow-up process with the student participants, I decided to test this theory and use the telephone numbers provided by each student. Surprisingly, the response was almost immediate. Further follow-up questions to the students were delivered via text messages which proved to be the most effective way to elicit a prompt response from this group of students.

Another revelation that surfaced after approval of the current study was the need to alter the student participant selection process. I erroneously assumed the response rate for the current study would necessitate the participant selection to be conducted by a non-biased third party to assure random selection and assignment. My initial plan for selecting participants for this study was to request the services of a qualified employee in the UNCP Office of Institutional Effectiveness who regularly employ such research practices in studies with UNCP students, faculty and staff. Of the 68 students in the study sample, only 14 indicated an interest in participating in the study and ultimately two of these 14 had schedule conflicts that we were unable to work through. The sample is comprised of twelve full-time American Indian students classified as seniors who did not transfer from another two-year or four-year institution. For this reason, the study participants were indeed all the students who were willing to participate. Since the student participants made the decision to respond to the online interest survey, I feel confident in the manner in which this sample was devised and that these students will provide an accurate representation of the true experiences of Native students on the UNCP campus.

The data collection of this qualitative component was not without challenges. I developed a false sense of confidence based on the response rate of a similar study in which Native students were solicited to complete an online questionnaire to assess their engagement on the UNCP campus. This particular mini-study resulted in a more than 15 percent response rate (approximately 170 students). However, as with this study, there were significant challenges with the arrangement of face-to-face meetings with American

Indian students. The complications of full-time course loads, employment obligations and familial responsibilities limit the amount of time to dedicate to formal meetings.

Student Participants—Brief Introductions

The following introductions will provide some background information for each study participant. To protect the anonymity of these students, the actual names are not used but instead a pseudonym was assigned to each and students were given the opportunity to change this if so desired at the follow-up to review and validate their transcribed comments. However, no students indicated a desire to change their pseudonym.

“Matthew,” age 22, was the only student who self-identified as a first generation college student. He resides about twenty miles from campus with his girlfriend and their two young children—one and seven years old. Like most of the participants, he attended a local high school where Natives are the majority of the student population. His tribal affiliation is Lumbee but he notes that his mother is White. He is not employed. His major is Political Science.

“Mark,” age 21, is single and resides at home with his parents. He does not have any dependents. Mark attended a predominantly White high school in Dillon, South Carolina, and he was the only American Indian in his graduating class. He is a member of the Lumbee Tribe. His degree is in Biology with career plans for the medical field.

“Luke,” age 23, is also single with no dependents and he lives with his parents in the local area. Luke, like most of the sample participants, attended the local high school

which was approximately 75 percent American Indian. His tribal affiliation is Lumbee. His major is Social Studies Education with a focus in American Indian Studies.

“Mary,” age 22 and single, lives approximately five miles from the campus but she resides in the home with her parents. Mary is an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe. Her major is Science Education.

“Lydia,” 22, is also single with no children and she lives in close proximity to the campus with her parents. Her tribal affiliation is Lumbee. Her major is Elementary Education.

“John,” age 23 and single with no dependents, resides in the home with his parents. John elected to serve his country in the United States Marine Corp after high school so his college admission was delayed one year. He is an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe. He describes his employment status as his service in the U.S. Marine Corp. Reserves. His major is Political Science.

“Esther,” age 21, is single with no children and she lives in an adjoining county with her parents. Esther was the only home-schooled student in the group. During her sophomore year, she was awarded work study on the campus. Her tribal affiliation is Lumbee. She is not employed outside her research assistant duties in one of the chemistry labs and a supplemental instruction leader. Her major is Biology.

“Ruth,” is 22 years old, single with no children, and resides locally with her parents. Ruth shared that she has medical challenges that have resulted in some set-backs during her enrollment at UNCP. She is an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe. She does not work. Her major is American Indian Studies.

“Martha,” is 21 years old and pregnant with her first child. She lives locally with her husband who is not a student but she expressed that he is very supportive of her higher education goals. She is employed in a local hospital pharmacy. Martha is a member of the Lumbee Tribe. Her major is Biology.

“Naomi,” is also 21 and she is single with no children. She shared early on in the session that her mother died during her sophomore year and she has been expected by her father to take on the “motherly” duties of the household as caretaker of his domestic needs and that of her younger brother and sister. Her tribal affiliation is Lumbee. Naomi is employed on campus as a student technician with our Department of Information Technology. She works approximately 25-30 hours each week. Her major is Political Science.

“Samuel,” is 22 years old and he is also single with no children. He shared that both his parents have medical challenges and he is responsible for their care. He lives close to the campus in the home with his parents. His tribal affiliation is Lumbee. Samuel is employed in the campus game room facility and works approximately 25-30 hours per week. His major is Social Studies Education.

“Hannah,” is 21 and she is also single with no dependents. She lives in the local area with her parents. Her tribal affiliations are Lumbee and Tuscarora. Hannah is also employed as a student technician with the campus Department of Information Technology. She works approximately 25-30 hours per week. Her major is Biology.

Preliminary Code and Theme Assignment

Throughout the data analysis, clear definition of the themes was important to the process. Some of the themes may have transformed through at least three to four title variations in an effort to present as clear a picture of the discussions as possible. For example, the initial code assignment relating to family support was this overarching title—“Family Support” but continued analysis of the data revealed that students discussed their families in two major context: “Family as a Support Mechanism” and the “Potential Challenges or Barriers that are related to their Familial Responsibilities and Relationships.”

These preliminary themes were then grouped into major code families (groups of codes) and populated with the associated comments from the students. The major codes with the associated narratives include the code families in which at least five students made reference to a particular theme. It should be noted that in the hierarchy of the data analysis, code family names, such as “Campus Culture,” serve as the umbrella for a series of sub-codes to describe different areas of discussion that emerged from these sessions. All student comments are indeed relevant but for the purpose of this study, the codes with at least five student comments will be categorized as significant and referenced in this section.

The process of thematic clustering yielded the following code families to be employed in this study: Transitioning to College, Campus Culture, Cultural Conflict, Support Mechanisms and Campus Involvement. As previously mentioned, the questions to guide these discussions were developed within the context of Tinto’s (1993) three-

stage model (Separation, Transition and Integration). The goal of the study is to examine Native student experiences at UNCP within this three-phase context and these questions were vital to ensure that the students addressed these areas. Additionally, the titles for the major themes were also included in the process of fine-tuning. It was not surprising that some of these major themes aligned with the NSSE Five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. For the purpose of this study, these codes families (major categories) will guide the presentation and discussion of the qualitative data.

The narratives to follow in this section represent the extensive process of qualitative data analysis conducted in the *Atlas.ti*® software utilized for this study. The initial review process of the data analysis consisted of a careful examination of the audio recordings of the Talking Circle sessions which yielded preliminary themes (codes) of discussions. Based on the nature of student comments, a descriptor was assigned as an initial code for the category. Gleaned from the process of initial data analysis, Table 5 lists the top ten codes—starting with the most frequently referenced themes from the discussions with these twelve participants.

The software calculated the number of the comments assigned to each code and this process was useful in determining the primary themes of this study. As reflected by the alignment in this list, “Family Support” was the most frequently cited theme in the sessions. Dialogue associated with the value of faculty support shared the tenth position with discussions that focused on the impact of work-study and their position as

commuters on campus involvement. This list is not the full extent of codes assigned to the comments of the students. Some of the additional themes included but were not limited to discussions relating to their transition from high school and the nature of their social connections that have changed since this transition to college. A number of the students described a sense of obligation to the tribal community in terms of their commitment to degree attainment.

Table 5

Major Codes from Talking Circle Sessions

Family Support
Realization of what is expected
Alienation/On Your Own/No sense of community
Not How I Was Raised
Self-Realization of Indianness
Inadequate Academic Preparation
Dealing with Stereotypes/Prejudice
Family—A Barrier
Representation of Tribal Culture
Faculty Support AND Work Study & Commuting

Transitioning to college.

Realization of what is expected. The most common theme of these discussions centered on the astonishment associated with the realizations that what was expected of them in higher education did not align with what they expected based on the nature of their experiences in high school. This transition period, most designated as the freshman

year, was identified as the most difficult timeframe of their college experience. This section will outline the factors these students attributed to the challenges they experienced in their transition from high school to the university setting.

Overwhelmingly, every student expressed some feelings of disconnect between their expectations of college and the actual expectations and realities of a university setting. A number of these students associate these moments with the grade assigned to their first college English paper. John describes what this incident was like for him and particularly the realization that university faculty expect him to write in a manner different from his Lumbee dialect.

John states,

I remember the first paper I ever wrote in college, it came back, I mean pure red, it was like—he said, ‘Look, you cannot use “can’t, don’t, won’t—you don’t put that in papers’ and I was like, ‘Really?’ I was like, ‘and that’s wrong?’ he said, ‘yeah,’ he said, ‘quit writing the way you talk,’ he said, ‘talk like me.’ I said, ‘Ok, I can try that.’ You know I wasn’t prepared but I feel—I always feel like I can compete against anybody—because they ain’t nobody gonna beat me.

I still think that school is kinda like a competition. You know I want to do the best I can. You know, I want to make that “A” and I don’t know, I know I wasn’t prepared but I try my best to adjust cause instead of memorizing, I try to learn it. It’s like I go to class today and the professor asked me something and I look at him and he says, ‘Is it like this or that?’ and then it clicks—and I remember what I need to say now and I remember what the answer is—so, I try.

Naomi shared a similar experience in reviewing her first graded writing assignments that leads to her decision to take advantage of the University Writing Center—a campus support system to assist students with developing their writing skills.

It had red pen markings all over it and I weren't use to it and everybody's like, 'Well, that's what they use out here—that's what they use is red pens and if you see red pens everywhere that means you did everything wrong.' So, I actually started going to the Writing Center—that's where I actually got help with writing my papers and back in high school, like I said, teachers would say, 'You're doing good, you're doing great.' [laughter] and that wouldn't be the case.

She adds that learning to adjust her speech patterns for the varying situations on campus was a benefit to her in her writing. "The way that I talk has no like effect on the way that I can write a paper. I can control mine [speech]—I can control it well." On the other hand, Martha experiences challenges with her writing because she has not developed the skill to control her Lumbee dialect. "I'm not good at writin' because I write the way I talk and when I'm around here, I don't talk no different than I does at home."

Matthew shares his thoughts on how different college is from high school, in that, the level of responsibility to perform well is now on the student and the consequences for poor performance not only reflects in poor grades but also the financial costs associated with college tuition of courses resulting in these less than satisfactory grades.

Matthew states,

Like when I graduated high school, I started summer school and came right in and so when I come to summer school, it weren't nuttin like when da fall came and I had 15 credit hours to do and der weren't nobody to help me and I didn't know what to do and everything wuz on me. So if the teacher said, 'Read dis here.' and I didn't read it and I went to class and took a test, you wouldn't have passed da exam. And whereas academics and if you don't keep your GPA up, you'll git put on academic probation, git kicked outta school and you have to pay for school so dat first semester is like a period when everybody's adjusting. When dey git der grade back and see dat dey didn't make what dey wanted to make, some people's gonna keep doin' da same thang whereas other's gonna step up and do what dey got to do to get it done.

Mark shares the sentiment that students have to make a deliberate mental shift to acknowledge the responsibilities associated with working toward a college degree. These students realize the financial costs associated with college attendance should motivate students to do their best.

I would have to say that students need to take the time to take a break and just git in the mindset of—you know, this is college, you know, you need to focus because your parents aren't gonna be there. You know they might be paying the bill but it's their money that you'll be wasting if you do not do the best you can.

Another significant realization for these students is that the days of “hand-holding” which they were so accustomed to in high school are now over. None of these students had experience with course syllabi in high school.

John states,

It's like in high school, you're always told everything, I remember one time I took class and somebody asked the professor ‘When's the next exam?’ and he said, ‘It's on your syllabus.’ and I'm like really? you can't just tell me and they're like, ‘ok, we're not gonna feed it to ya, we're not gonna hand it to ya, we're not gonna hold your hand through college the way they did in high school’—that's an adjustment.

Luke shares a strategy with the group that he developed at the realization that course syllabi in higher education are one of the lifelines to success.

And now I sit down and as soon as I git all my syllabuses—all my syllabi together, I just sit der and I make out a list of everything [group chuckles in agreement] every paper's due and even when da extra credit is due. I do a whole list—I can show it to ya.

Luke introduces another discussion topic by sharing his realization that he had to learn to be more outgoing in the college setting. Native students have a tendency to group together and many experience challenges with venturing outside their comfort zones to meet and interact with other people. Many of the students recognize this as problematic but it is commonplace for those who are moving from an environment where they were the majority to the college setting where they are in the minority.

I mean, when I first started here, I was really, really, uh, I would say, uh, shy, I ain't lying to ya. I mean, I was outta my box, you know, from high school. So I really didn't talk to nobody but over the years, I mean, I had no other choice but to become—tryin' to get outta my shell and actually speak to other people because in the History Department, right now, I know of only five Native Americans even in the History Department and alot of times, we don't even have classes together so and I mean, you do need to try and talk to people. I've gotten better at it but at the same time, I just still, I still mainly stick around with my few select friends who I hang out wid.

This was particularly significant for Esther, the only student in the group who was home-schooled by her mother. She adds that these social skills are a significant part of the transition to the college setting. “Social factors, definitely, being able to interact with other kids that are different than you, um, as well as faculty too.”

For many of these students, their Lumbee dialect was never an issue until their enrollment at UNCP and there were incidents when it was called to their attention as a factor that was—in many cases—unacceptable. Most of the students attended high schools where the tribal dialect was commonplace and never questioned so it was certainly a significant realization to learn that even the manner in which they spoke would be challenged by others on the university campus. Naomi, who works on the

campus for the Department of Information Technology, recognized the importance of learning what occasions would necessitate speaking proper English and when it was acceptable to engage in discussions in her tribal dialect.

I use to pick on my momma alot cuz like I would be wid her at work and I'm like, 'Momma, why do you talk like you're White around some people?' She would say, like, '[Naomi], that is just the way that you talk around certain people' and I was like, at first I couldn't understand it but then when I started gettin' more involved out here on campus, that's when I started noticing it and people started comin' up to me and tellin' me and especially now, I talk to a guy that went to Purnell and so he stays like right down the road from me and he's like, '[Naomi], I can tell that you talk different around other people' so that's how I learned.

Naomi explains that she had to develop the skill of “turning off” her tribal dialect when necessary and the controversy this presents with her family and friends when she adapts her speech for certain groups of people.

Naomi explains,

. . . [C]ertain people because they think that I'm trying maybe to give up the way that I talk and my culture to try to blend in with others and they see that as a negative thang but I see it as a positive thang so—

“Why is it a positive thing?”

Because people's gonna have to learn like to understand you—ok like for example—‘water’, I say ‘warder’ but when I go to certain places, I say ‘water’ because a lot of people don't understand what I'm talkin' about when I say ‘I want some warder.’ [laughter] I mean, it's just all about people understanding you.

A significant realization for many of these students is that they must now begin to study as a result of their poor performance on tests. Proper study habits, skills not developed by many of these students who actually graduated in the top of their high school classes, was

now a requirement for their survival in the college setting. This adaptive decision supports Tinto's (1993) suggestion that students must adopt the values and norms of the campus environment for successful transition to the new setting. The academic expectations and requirements associated with their former environment (i.e. high school) clearly did not align with those of the university campus culture. As such, the participants recognized this inadequacy in their skill set and adapted accordingly by sharpen their study habits to meet the academic requirements of the college environment. None of the student participants indicated that the adoption of this "survival tactic" resulted in any associated cultural conflict. Despite the potential challenges linked with this transition, the students recognized this was simply a necessary adjustment for their goal attainment.

Martha shares her struggles with transitioning to the college setting and her strategies for making the adjustment from high school. She states,

For me, high school, I didn't hardly study much—it just came natural to me. Coming to college—I have to study, I mean, there's no—I just have to and organize—you have to be very organized. You have to learn how to talk in front people, no matter what—teachers will make you—most teachers will make you, you know. They gonna ask you something in class, they expect you to answer whether you want to or not and that right there was a big issue for me because I'm not a good talker—I don't like to talk that much but um, that—talking and being social, studying alot and being organized—gettin' my career path on track, um after I leave from here—what do I want to do next. Do I want to go to graduate school? So there's a lot of—people out here to help you—advisors, um, programs that's out here.

Naomi adds . . .

I had to learn studying habits, Oh Ga, but now since I've learned those studying habits, it makes it so much easier, if like, I mean, I'm still in my senior year but I feel it bein' more easier because I know what da teachers expect now. I think its dealing wid—over time and learning how to do stuff.

In addition to recognizing the value of good study habits, Naomi validates the importance of seeking assistance from faculty and staff on the campus.

I think one of the main thangs is gettin' help from some of my professors. If I didn't know sumthing in class, I would go to my professor's office and have a one-on-one conversation wid him about what I didn't understand. As far as my writin', I went to the Writing Center and they would help me with a lot of my papers and that's how I learned that but over time, you get the studying habits and you know what they're expecting and so eventually, you catch on and that's how I learned.

These realizations of what is expected for college degree attainment joined with the inadequate preparation Luke felt he gain in the local high school were the motivating factors to pursue a degree in the field of education.

Luke said,

Dat's one of da big reasons I want to become an educator. I'm a history major now. I understand now da importance of learning how da read material and actually soak da material in and den not just dat but spittin' da material back out so dat it makes sense to uder people. And actually express your own ideas about reading material. High school, I probably mighta read one book in high school. I'll be honest widcha and I come out here to college and I got five books for one class and I mean, it wuz a big adjustment. I learned how to do it and now since I'm learned how to do it and everythang, it's been my biggest motivation was actually—I wantta go back to my old high school and teach history but at da same time, prepare students for college. Not just—it's not just here to look, memorize and think I'ma give ya a test, it not dat—it's not like dat when you come to college. Especially not in my History Department, I mean, if I have a multiple

choice test—I'm lucky. I mean, everythang's in mine is essays—essay tests or otherwise a 5 or 6 page essay. More than likely like 3 or 4 big essays and dat's all my classes so dat's all I have to do is learn how to write and den interpret information. That's what I really want to do—I wanna go to high school and teach students how to do dat—not just to make good enough to git by but actually excel in college. Because the English professors, I mean da English teachers in high school, dey didn't teach us anythang about how to write papers and I mean—dat's—to me dat's what I feel is da biggest let down because once we git here, you're on your own now. I mean, nobody's—who's gonna help ya.

Inadequate academic preparation. Realization of what is expected in college was the precursor for corresponding dialogue to focus on the dismay associated with the inadequate level of academic preparedness they bring to the college environment. Luke shares his thoughts on this and the impact on other Native students. Luke explains,

When I first started out here, there wuz so many Indian people. But I mean, we have so many people dat transfers, dat just gives up and transfers goes to RCC or transfers to other community colleges. They just—they give up on it. It's just the whole adjustment from high school. All of us went to Purnell Swett—[Addressing the others] How much did Purnell Swett prepare us for this kinda—for your freshman year, I took 17 hours as a freshman—my freshman semester. I mean, it blew my mind. I mean, I'll be honest wid ya. I didn't know—my writing class—I didn't know APA, MLA or Chicago style format wuz. I just wasn't prepared for it and people just git discouraged because dey feel like dey cain't do it. I mean, and I felt like I couldn't do it but I just had to—you know, git my mind straight on it and just focus on it.

Luke attributes this inadequate high school preparation to the lack of resources available to the local high schools which are positioned in one of the “poorest counties in the state.” Mary interjects her belief that inadequate academic preparedness contributes to the feelings of intimidation that Native students experience when they enroll at UNC Pembroke and these feelings of intimidation may also attribute to their inability to readily interact beyond the realms of comfort with non-Native students and faculty.

I think the American Indian students are intimidated. We're intimidated. You know, even though this is our town and this is our place and we're strong people and if you say something, we're quick to buck up, we're still intimidated to be in class with other people that aren't Native American. We don't feel like we're smart enough. We don't feel like—we wasn't prepared. I feel like people who aren't Native American can come here and make friends because dey know how to do it. Dey probably had to do it in high school and dey knew each other and we know each other so we don't have to make those initiative relationships and it's intimidating.

Lydia agrees that high school did not prepare them to write papers, how to study, nor all the academic skills required to be successful in college. Many felt that their high school teachers did not challenge them. "If you did not understand a concept, they simply told you what to do." Students were simply not encouraged to develop critical thinking skills in high school. "It was really all about who you knew and if the teacher liked you." This was also a factor for Naomi that contributed to her insufficient level of academic preparedness as she describes her freedom to come and go in her senior year of high school.

She explains,

As far as high school for me—it was a breeze. It was all about who you know. In my situation it is because my grandmother worked in the cafeteria and if I wanted to get outta school, I could get outta school—'Grandma, come sign me out and get me out' so it was all about who I knew especially my senior year. My senior year was a breeze—I did absolutely nothing but my first year in college was difficult which I'm not really um—I was the top in my class so as far as academic lies—I'm like really smart but I really didn't have too much problems wid like certain classes. Chemistry—I didn't really git but I had a teacher that worked wid me because I didn't learn much science in high school but as far as I know writin' was another big issue that I had problems wid but after a while I got better wid it.

Despite the activity in her senior year, Naomi—like many of the students in this study, graduated in the top of their high school classes and most had GPAs higher than 3.2 when they graduated from high school.

Interestingly, in another session, Esther also shares the lack of academic challenge from her mother, in the teacher role, that she now recognizes was present in her home school environment. Additionally, she realizes that good study habits—even the knowledge of how to study—was absent from her high school experience. These factors joined with the need for suitable writing skills drive their feelings of inadequacy in terms of their academic preparation in high school.

Social connection with friends who value college. As students reflected on their transition from high school to college, they discussed their relationships with friends from high school. Some of the students maintained friendships with students from their high school, but for those who transitioned on as a result of different life choices and enrollment at other institutions, maintaining these friendships presented some challenges. In other instances, the participants acknowledged a shift of the characteristics that defined their current circle of friends. The most significant factor gleaned from these discussions was the value in engaging with people who value and is actively pursuing a college degree. Luke shares how his friends from high school are no longer in his immediate circle of current relationships.

Honestly, I've had to let a lot of friends go. I had a lot of friends dat started dealin' wid drugs or dem kinda instances. I just felt like it was in my best interest to let alot of'em—a lot of my friends from high school go. But da friends dat I do hang out wid now have been very supportive. Mainly the people dat I do hang out wid now are college students or college students who are still in college and tryin'

to do da good for themselves and just about all my friends da I do really keep in touch wid are gettin' ready to graduate or have already graduated.

Mary adds that current activities also impact the circle of friends, which may or may not be different than those from high school.

When I got to college—da older you git, da smaller your circlce of friends git so, 'Do I still hang around wid da same people I do in high school?' No. 'Do I still see'em?' Yea, we hang out every once in a while but not as many. So when I came—as does friend dwindle down, I became more involved wid different organizations. I became more involved wid different stuff and my church in da community and den I joined a sorority and so, I still, I guess you could say—I still have friends who live around here but now its kinda like a different set but yet in da same circle.

John shares their sentiments on how he notices that his circle of friends has changed since his enrollment at UNC Pembroke.

I always feel like every person I meet is a friend so but those friendships have evolved. Some have become less from high school. But mainly da people dat I really consider real good friends now is da ones dat I see everyday—dat I go to class wid everyday and doz are like my really strong core group of friends. You know dey didn't take da same path I did den we're not as strong as friends as we were in high school.

Life choices seem to drive the decision to maintain relationships with high school friends.

The study participants acknowledge the value in surrounding themselves with like-minded people who share their core values—particularly, the value of college degree attainment.

Ruth adds . . .

As far as my friends dat I graduated high school wid, um, I'm 'bout like da only one, outta all my friends, dat I actually graduated around dats actually doin' sumon wid my life. Da rest of'em have either go married, went to da military, which is doin' something but da did move away here cause dat wuz der only choice—to go in da military or marred—sum of'ems got two or three children now and sum of'em I've seen der on drugs now. Dey use to be—dey had so much potential in high school, it's just whatever event happened in der life, dey just choose to go down da wrong path.

Many of the students in this study shared that they had to transitioned to a different circle of friends since graduation from high school. Ruth expresses gratitude that she was reared to value education and unlike some of her high school friends she understands that education is the gateway to economic stability in Robeson County.

I went to school with a lot of my friends from high school and they came out here and their's like '[Ruth], I just think college is not for me,' I said, 'Well it's not for everybody, you know, some people's good with their minds and some people's good with their hands—just do whatever you're meant to do—just pray about it and the Lord'll lead you to it.' I said, 'Just know that in life to have a good job or to have anybody take you serious—you've gotta have that degree or their gonna be like, 'Who are you? You have no educational experience, you're nothing to me.' So I try to stress that to my friends plus everybody always tells me I've always been the black sheep, the little weirdo and dis and dat but I feel like I'm glad my parents raised me like dat and dat my grandparents stressed dat in me because if dey didn't I wouldn't be the person I am today, I wouldn't care about education. I'd probably be married with three heads of youngin's—settling down like everybody else but I don't see marriage anytime in my future because I plan to have—I plan to live my life before I actually give life and settle down. I want to get out and see the world and go experience different cultures and places. And I can say by my mother, you know, having the advantage of being a dentist, she took us places outside of Robeson County on trips to museums, art exhibits—she put me in dance, karate, music lessons, piano, everything so by her giving me dat—she showed me a world outside of Robeson County dat alot of children don't see around here besides going to the skating ring on Friday night da do whatever. And I feel like a lot of children 'round here need dat to know there's life outside of Robeson County instead of just sittin' 'round smokin' grass all day, gettin'

drunk, makin' bond fires, goin' shootin' up cars, goin' cruzin' on Sunday, goin' swimmin' in da river and den repeatin'. There's life outside of dat.

Campus Culture.

Alienation/on your own/no sense of community. The students discussed elements of the college campus culture that they felt attributed to feelings of discomfort and anxiety often challenged their sense of belonging on this campus with a history of educating American Indian students. John shares quite often about his feelings of alienation on the campus.

He states,

If I want to join a Political Science club and I'm the only American Indian there—I'm not use to that at all. Usually if I join a clubs [in high school], that's all there is—is American Indian students and here it's not.

He frequently references his position as the only Indian and “being all alone” in particular situations. There are a number of occasions that he makes the choice not to be involved on campus for fear of “being the only Indian.” John asserts,

I think about it [being involved on campus] and then I'm like, ‘Nah,’ because, you know, I feel that I'm not gonna be that important and you kinda want to be, you know, I don't know, I kinda feel like if I do dis or do dat, I'm just gonna be another number. You know, where if I go home, I'm “John” because there's that sense of family, you know, I don't know, I just feel like I'm not, I'm not unique because I'm not like everybody else and I know that's not true but that's just the sense of feeling that I get.

On another occasion in this session, He remarks,

It's like sometimes like there wuz one semester I wuz ask to, uh, to join SGA [Student Government Association]—actually I wuz kinda pressured into it because they didn't have no Indians on der— the president really wanted me on it so I joined and one thing I noticed, like, if I would ever speak, the whole room would get quiet, like, 'Oh, the Indians sayin' something'—that's exactly the way I felt, like, 'Ok, now the Indian sayin' something,' you know and I felt like, there wuz so many times I voted all by myself and I don't know if that was just the way I felt or just what but like and nobody wanted to, like, work with me anythang and they didn't want to do anythang and I don't know if they didn't thank I was as smart as they wur or I couldn't compare to them—it just seemed like even them I was an outsider. I don't know—it's just like comin' out here, I'm not this school, I don't know why . . .

He later adds . . .

Sometimes I feel like, in these classes, we've got a small department and I'm by myself—the only Indian in der—I feel like it really is me against the whole class and I think that's the reason why I try to be as outspoken in class and try to participate in class as much as I can because I feel like it's me against all of 'em. It's like when I'm walking around here—it's me against everybody that's not like me. I don't know why I have that mentality. That's why in between classes, I go to the game room because everybody is just like me. And you know, I'm ok and I don't have to worry about it's me versus everybody else.

Mary compares the college campus culture and how that differs from the environment they were accustomed to in high school. This was a disappointment for many of the study participants. She states,

My biggest thing is that in high school, you're a community—people know you—people's gonna love you and open their arms and get to know you on a personal basis. So, when you come to college you think, 'I'm going to UNCP, oh, it's gonna be the same thang—it's here in town and even some of my teacher's Indian and so it's gonna be the same but it's not.'

Luke adds . . .

Here's the thing—in high school, everybody's got class together and in between classes everybody walks around together—everybody's together in high school and when you got here, I've got a class and maybe all of us have different majors. I stay in the history department or out here in Old Main because I'm an American Indian Studies and a History major, I don't see nobody from the Business building or the Psychology building and most of us have different classes at different times. Not only that, you got to look at, um, he's in a fraternity (referencing another participant) and ya'll's in a sorority (referencing the two female participants) and who do ya'll mainly hang out with? sorority sisters?—and fraternity members usually hang out with other fraternity members and then you got—it's like—there's different cliques out here at the same time, I mean, that's the way I look at it, I mean, you've got different little groups.

Mary continues,

I feel the same way, like, I look at my friends that went off to school and when I think of my friends that went off to NC State, I see them as being part of a Wolfpack and I don't feel like a Brave, I don't feel like I'm, I just feel like, you know how when the people that graduate from the school and put 'UNCP' on the front of your car, I don't feel like I'd want that on my car because it don't mean nuthin' to me—it's just the degree that I got from here but I don't feel like it's any different if I had went to RCC [Robeson Community College]—

The students appear to equate this lack of community on the campus to fostering the independent mentality that yields feelings of loneliness. Mary shares, “It's everybody on their own, you're on your own. You don't have a support system . . . you got to get your's like everybody else has to get their's.”

John also interjects,

It's like studying for a test, like, there's nobody for me to study with before I start to class and if I'm in a class with 15 people, 14 of'em, I probably don't know and if I want to study for a test or write a paper or do something, you know, I've got to introduce myself to somebody and like “Hey, well, come over to my place later

on” or like, “hey, let’s go to the library” and it’s like to I really want to go somewhere and meet these people and study with ’em because I don’t know ’em like that and at least when you’re in high school, you can call somebody and say, “Hey Man, do you know what’s going on in class?” and you know, they can tell me. But here it’s not—it seems like I have to do everything on my own.

Luke also comments,

To me that’s what I feel is the biggest let down because once we get here, you’re on your own. Nobody’s gonna help you. I mean you can’t just sit there and ask. Yea, we’re not gonna sit there and ask, you know, the White guy or the Black guy sittin’ next to you because we didn’t grow up with White people like that, you know, we just didn’t do it.

Mary adds, “And we’re prideful people anyway.”

Another sense of contention for these students is their perception of the institution’s apathetic commitment to the Native roots and history of the University. The consensus of the group is that the historical picture, a significant part of their tribal heritage, is far from the experiences of alienation and sense of disconnection they share as part of the current student body. Luke expressed his frustrations in his perceptions that the campus administration fails to provide role models for Native students in the form of employing American Indians in jobs other than grounds and lower level support positions.

My biggest thing about this college is look at all the grounds keepers—all of ’em are Native American. Look at the people’s that working in Lumbee Hall—the Native Americans don’t have any high-paying jobs, you know what I’m sayin’. The professors out here—how many Native American professors do we have? Maybe less than ten? I mean, granted, they sit there and try to say, ‘Oh, we’re gonna make this—it’s superficial. When you have all these people out there that’s working but actually, in reality, you only have ten Native American professors out

here. They don't do a good enough job going out gettin' Native American professors.

The students describe their disappointment that they do not feel connected to the campus community. The disconnection is such that some equate their college experience to “just something that I do . . .”

John explains,

I mean, every so often my brother asks me, ‘When you graduating? You graduate in December? You graduate in May? You graduate early—you gonna take an extra year?’ He always there but I think all this reinforces my idea that it’s a job—I get up, I go to school, I go home—like a 9 to 5 job and that’s it and if I do my job, I don’t need nothing else or nobody else. You know, no matter what any professor sayz or what the perception is of any other student—I do my job. I just go to school—I’m gone.

Without question, the students agreed that their involvement on the campus is simply the means to an end. Based on their discussion in this session, their lack of connection to this cornerstone in the Lumbee community and a significant part of their tribal heritage has been a source of disappointment instead of encouragement.

Self-realization of Indianness. Another discussion in the area of campus culture focused on the self-realization of Indianness that has occurred since their enrollment at UNC Pembroke. It is uncommon for Indian families to spend time discussing the elements of their tribal heritage. Indians value their culture and rest on the fact that it is not necessary to call attention to their Indianness. Mary states, “Before coming to college, we’re all people and when you come to campus, there’s a time when you realize, I’m not

people, I'm Indian." Many of these students share experiences on the college campus when for the first time; their tribal heritage was called to the forefront of their existence. She adds,

It's like I never experience somebody lookin' at me different, it like when you go to high school, you think 'we're all people, we're all people' and then you think 'Oh my God, I'm Indian—I'm not people' you know what I'm sayin'? It's different. And they flock together too but it's more noticeable when we flock together. They'll, they'll—I've had people in class that won't have nothing to do with me or won't talk to me—just because they're White girls or they all flock together but it's like—that's just the way that it is.

As a result of this realization, the students describe their strategies to stay connected with other Indian students—a tactic that was unnecessary when many were among the majority on their high school campuses. Martha had never really considered that she employed this strategy to stay at a reasonable comfort level and was really quite shocked when she realized in these discussions, "Everybody that I hang around is like me."

John states,

Being or like where we're coming from—where we're the majority—everyone's just like you and here it's not—ain't too many people here who's just like me. And you know it's kinda weird—like when you walk into a classroom and I try to see where I want to sit at—well, I sit near people who's just like me or that I know or that I can relate to.

Mary also shares,

Indian people stick together—like if I walk into a class and I see an Indian person, I automatically go and sit in the vicinity of them because I feel comfortable doing that or if we hang out—we all go hang out in the game room or in the UC [University Center]—even if we don't know each other, we'll get to know each

other before we go sit beside some random person we don't even know or kinda even know cause we see 'em in class. Cause it's about being comfortable.

Mary continues,

I mean, I'm an outgoing person, I can make friends with anybody so in high school weren't a big deal but it's like—we feel comfortable with each other. Even if I've never met "Luke" in my life, and I just walked in here, I would sit beside of him—just because he's like me. It's comfortable, you know I'm comfortable—I feel comfortable around him even if I don't know him.

Ruth shares her thoughts on this issue,

Like when you walk into classrooms—even classrooms are segregated—if you come in—I automatically—I do it—I'm guilty of it—I look to see if there's any Indians in der and I'll go sit with 'em. So in class, you'll have a group of Indians—sittin' in a corner and then everybody else everywhere and most of us associate with each other and get in groups together because, I mean, we understand each other and stuff. I mean, I've been in groups with other people and they be like, 'Whatcha say? What? Huh?' I'm like, I don't talk that bad now, come on—they're like, 'Seriously, come on, whatcha say?' It's just—I mean, I just don't think the college is doing like they should as far as bringing about awareness about Native American culture in general to any of the students out here.

Interestingly, this was not a factor for Mark because he attended a high school that was predominantly White so the distinct feelings associated with "being the only Indian" in any particular situation was familiar to him.

Mark shares his thoughts on this issue,

I went to Iowa for the summer for an internship and they don't have many Native Americans up there and that's when I actually had to realize that I was Native American. People could assume that I was White with a tan, they could assume that I was half White, half Black, which they did so those situations put in perspective that you're Indian and you need to address that, you know, or there's

gonna be other assumptions. So when you're in an area like Robeson County, I think that people have a better understanding of who you are—so I really don't get that feeling that I need to express myself as Native American.

The challenge for those students attending predominantly Native high schools is that this sense of “standing out” is not familiar to them so they exercise every effort to connect with “what’s familiar.”

Some students recognize the value in engaging non-Native students and become more engaging as they learn the value of associations outside their tribal community.

Naomi discusses how she once shared the same practice of seeking other Native students to near in her classes but as she progressed to her senior year, that practice became less frequent.

It was a little bit awkward, I would say, cause when you first go into your classes, like at Purnell, you know everybody in your class. When you come here, I was sorta shy, I really didn't want to anybody because I really didn't know 'em, you know to talk to 'em. But as time progressed and now that I'm getting into my Senior year, I know most of the people in my class but it's not because they're from this area. I think it's just because of me having the same classes they've had but being a freshman, I was nervous to talk to people because I really didn't know what to say to 'em and stuff.

Hannah shared a perspective that was unique to the other students in the study.

I didn't look at myself like ‘Oh, God, I'm Native American, what do I do?’ or that type thing. I mean, there was still a bunch of African American people and we had a few Hispanic people and a few White people but I don't know how they felt because at that time, I was in the majority so it didn't bother me. I had been in the majority just about all of my life as far as going to school and being Native American—that was who I went to school wid—that was what I grew up wid. Thangs didn't really change as far as for me until I become a freshman in high school and a freshman in college—and I said now I'm starting to get mixed in with all these different cultures—type thang. But being a freshman in high school

was not as bad than being out here where it's just like—I'm Native American—like in one of my classes, I think there is maybe two Native Americans out of like 35 students. Everybody else is either White, Black, Hispanic or something like that and then you're kinda looking at like—well, like the discussions in class you hear all the different types of views and it's like, the two Native American students' views are like different from everybody else's—as far as like when we do discussions or something like that in class.

It was interesting to hear Hannah's perspective on this topic. Her view was that the one or two American Indians in a course had an opportunity to share a worldview that was most unique and of value to the other students and faculty in the class.

Dealing with stereotypes/prejudice. A salient issue gleaned from the discussion of the campus culture was the experiences that students were faced with stereotypes and other various forms of prejudice. One area of discrimination most discussed centers on the negative perceptions associated with the Lumbee dialect. Students describe situations in which they are automatically labeled by non-Native students and faculty as uneducated and “back woods” when they spoke in their Native dialect. For example, John shares,

Other students—they have such a negative perception of us, like you know, like when we come into a class, like I talk a lot in class, and if you say anything, they hear the way you talk and they're like, ‘Ok, I know where this guy is coming from and he is probably uneducated and he don't know nothing . . .’

He raised a related issue with the institution's requirement of a speech test for incoming freshman that many Lumbee students fail and results in their being required to take remedial English courses. John was one of these students who failed the speech test and he recalls that most the students in this remedial English course were Lumbee Indians. “I think it's racist and it targets us, it targets American Indian students.”

Naomi describes her perceptions of the discrimination and prejudice experienced by Lumbee students on the UNCP campus.

[T]hat you have slang and you can't write and you can't talk right—you're racist, I know that's a big one, um, like I said about how your parents taught you to deal with people of your own race and I feel like a lot of people—a lot of Indians do listen to their parents when it comes to that aspect—except for a few that don't but it's just how we were raised—that's just how we were taught—not to—you know, be involved with other races and I think a lot of the other races know that too, especially if they have been here for a while. They know how we flock together and stuff.

Several students describe experiences in classrooms where they are subjected to blatant racist comments by non-Native students and even faculty. John states,

My advisor, he's really good, he is really good about getting Indians involved but I have had professors who just made demeaning comments about the community—about us—and it's like, 'Do I really want to sit here?' Like how can I expect to get an education from this guy when he does not know my experiences and he's put me down and he doesn't know nothing about me.

Luke recalls a similar incident when one of his professors made a derogatory statement about Indians in his class.

It was in the Native American's best interest that the Europeans came over here. He said, 'We did them a favor.'—Statement by UNCP faculty member—Student is angry that Native students are the focus of stereotypical/discriminatory statements by faculty & students in the classroom. There are times when AI students are the focus of ridicule and joking statements.

Ruth expresses her frustrations with the ongoing need to defend her Lumbee dialect to students and faculty from outside the local community. She shares an incident in one of her online classes where she challenges a Black student's statement that "I cannot

understand anything these Indians say.” The need to be in constant defense of their tribal dialect is exasperating for many of the Native students who refuse to adjust their speech to varying situations as Naomi describes to be necessary to function on the college campus.

Luke shares an incident of discrimination involving non-Native students that occurred during his first year that left a lasting impact on his experiences at the institution.

One of the first parties I ever went to out here, my sister told me about it because she was in a White sorority out here, Tri Sig, she invited me to it, Tri-Sig, so I said, ‘Ok’ and I cared a couple of my buddies wid me, who had just started college, you know, wanting to get out and mingle—meet different people, ok, so I go and we knock on the door and they opened up the door and said, ‘No locals,’ and slammed it, you know, I mean, what do you expect when that’s one of your first experiences on a college campus.

I just don’t see the point of it—tryin’ even sometimes because like I said, now when that incident that happened at that party, I mean, that’s stuck wid me the whole time, you know, I mean, I can go to parties now, I mean, and of course, I know a lot more people now or something but I haven’t been to parties out here in two years or so really . . .

In another session, Ruth shares an incident where she overhears a conversation between two Black students and a White student discussing their perceptions of the Indian community through their shared stereotypes associating violent behavior with the Lumbee students. Ruth explains how she interjects and “schools” these students on the fallacies of their misperceptions. With similar experiences, a number of these students share their perception that non-Native students and faculty from outside the local community perpetuate rumors of violence that is supposedly initiated by local Indians.

The participants are very frustrated that the wrongdoings of a few locals are the foundation for the stereotypes and discrimination they experience on the college campus.

Representation of tribal culture. Comments shared by students regarding their perceptions of the manner in which their tribal culture is represented on the UNCP campus were also prominent. There are mixed messages regarding whether the campus adequately represents tribal culture. Naomi believes that the provision of scholarships for Native American students and the campus involvement in the annual Lumbee Homecoming events represents the campus support of tribal culture. Martha believes, “They try, I mean, they do have a lot of stuff going on out here dat dey try to support Native Americans.” Matthew shares his views on whether the campus adequately supports tribal culture.

Our mascot is the Braves and I’m Indian. Pembroke [UNCP] was founded as an Indian school and buildings on campus were named after like Lumbee Hall was named after Lumbee Indians so I feel like my culture is represented on campus based on the fact it’s from an Indian past. They also have pow wows and when 4th of July comes around, they host events here too, they have speakers about culture and they host events about Indians, they have clubs for Indians, fraternities and sororities for Native Americans.

Ruth argues that American Indian fraternities and sororities are failing in their true purpose of promoting tribal culture on the campus. Her issue is that the campus administration is not doing what it could to promote an awareness of tribal culture for everyone on the campus. She feels that courses in History & Culture of the Lumbee should be a requirement for all incoming students. People on the campus should have

some knowledge of the Lumbee and their culture since the school is situated in the midst of the largest Lumbee community in the United States.

Additionally, she believes the institution should provide culture classes, taught by tribal elders, in the areas of agriculture, pottery, sewing and other areas of Native culture that is lost to so many young adults. The campus does not offer any opportunities focused on the preservation of Lumbee culture. She also believes Native students should have a gathering place on the campus—a place where they can connect and feel at home. “Dis is a Native American college, dey should have a building for us.”

Mary agrees that the campus administration does not adequately support American Indian culture at UNC Pembroke.

I just feel like, you know how when the people that graduate from the school and put ‘UNCP’ on the front of your car, I don’t feel like I’d want that on my car because it don’t mean nuthin’ to me—it’s just the degree that I got from here but I don’t feel like it’s any different if I had went to RCC—I don’t feel like it’s any more special, you know what I’m sayin’? I just feel like it’s not—I feel like where I go to church—makes me, I feel like who my parents are—makes me, I feel like where I went to high school—makes me, I feel like going to UNCP doesn’t make me. [Is that you or the school?] Both. I don’t feel like the school wants me here too—at the same time. I think the school would rather push us under a rug and go about their business than to have to put forth an effort to keep us around. I don’t think they paint or help paint a positive image of us and I don’t think they help, um, keep our heritage alive.

Cultural Conflict.

“Not how I was raised.” In this section, the students describe their experiences on the campus in terms of how they perceive their tribal culture to be in conflict with that of the campus culture. The most significant component of this discussion focused on their

rearing in a tribal community introduced some levels of discomfort and often challenges.

Mark shares his conflict with the campus culture.

For me—growing up with two parents who have family farms on both sides, and who went to school and got their education, I was raised to believe that hard work has good reward and that Christianity is your religion and you know, live the best you can by that. So, when I came here, um, I don't see many students or many faculty pushing students to work hard—pushing students to think outside the box like I would think they might be because I went to a high school where, you know, I had better one on one ratio with teachers and they pushed us—they pushed us hard but you don't get that same feeling when you come out here especially from students—you don't see the willingness—like I use to see.

Matthew presents his perspective with the caveat that he is of mixed-race ancestry.

Being that I'm mixed, I have more beliefs on the White side of my family than the Indian side of my family where things were different but I was raised in a Holiness Church of God where I was always taught to do what was right and that it was always best to go to school and getcha education. My family—where I've got aunts and uncles who graduated from college and they said it's go head better to go to college because if you don't, you will never be nuttin' and never have nothing so there weren't really no conflicts in between it.

Religious differences between Lumbee students and faculty often result in debates

because the religion is so interwoven in the tribal culture of many Lumbee students. As

Naomi explains,

I had a religion professor—he believed—he didn't believe in God—he believed in something else and see around here—we have a strong belief in God—now we have different sections like Baptist and Methodist and stuff but we all have a common belief in God. And he was just saying what he believed and I told him what I believed and we just got into a debate about it and it didn't go well—well it didn't go very well.

Hannah adds . . .

I mean like—my family is very Christian-based that's kinda like what I've always known so for me—like—seeing as far as like differences in like people's culture and like not even mainly like culture type but I guess different people in general and with most of the people who stay in Robeson County, Hoke County, Scotland County or somewhere like dat—I mean those are what I would consider all Christian-based counties because that's just—we never had to like experience like going to a university of something like dat or a different type of culture or religion. I mean we did have a few like Mormons but not like a great big or overabundance—um, as far as here—you see all kinds of like religions and dat type of stuff.

Martha shares an experience when she realized the university campus would be a place where all people may not share her same values and for this reason, she must exercise caution in sharing her beliefs as not to offend anyone.

For me it was I think just last week really because this is a very diverse school for it to be a Native American school—it's very diverse. The same thang—religion—I was talking to another fella, I think he was an Arab or something like that and yeah, you have to watch what you say because he believes different from what I believe but it really wasn't no dispute or nothing. We were just talking about his belief was different from mine. It just—you just have to watch what you say in classrooms or religion class or anywhere because some people just takes the offensive but he didn't but there some other people that they do.

Hannah adds . . .

Now, I kinda have to watch what I say around people becuz of the fact that—becuz growing up in high school, you wuz around the same people all da time and everybody thought the same way. You could say something and everybody around ja would agree wid ja. It's not like dat now. Now you have to watch what you say or you have to say something around a certain group of people but you know that it's not something that you can say around another group.

Many of the students shared their commitment to Christian values as a fundamental component of their tribal culture. Samuel asserts “Me—being a Native American—a Lumbee Native American—Christianity is weaved right into my fiber—my being . . .” A number of participants shared their disbelief with the level of disrespect among the non-Native students on the campus. Esther explains,

For me—being around people that cuss a lot, smoking—little things like that—that’s not a big deal to some—I’m not usually around that. Um, talking back to the teachers—stuff like that—um, being disrespectful. I’ve seen some kids that would just right when the teachers are talking—just come up in front of the class and sit on his desk.

Martha also describes her discomfort with the disrespect some non-Native students exhibit in her classes.

People get up when they want to get up, go to the bathroom when they want to go to the bathroom. Just for example, this semester I’ve got a girl in like one of my classes and she gets up every single day—I mean it’s nothing to her and see to me, actually the other day I looked at another student—I mean it bothers me because it’s disrespectful to the teacher. I mean she gets up every day—she never misses a class period where she gets up and it’s just—I wasn’t raised like that and I guess she mighta been raised different but I wasn’t raised like that and it really bothers me and I’m not even her or the teacher so . . .

Naomi adds . . .

As far as like on campus, I know, I grew up having a lot of respect like for my elders. A lot of people on campus do not have respect for anybody that is older than them on campus and I see that alot especially in some of my classes. Like some of my teachers would be like ‘Be quiet’ and I’ve heard people like cuss at her—like instructors and stuff. You see—I grew up—you’d get slapped for doing something like that. And that’s part of like my culture—I don’t think it’s right to disrespect your elders. That’s one of the big things that I’ve seen on campus.

This component of being respectful and speaking only when asked—presents a challenge for many Native students because the culture of the mainstream classroom is indicative of the ability to be outspoken and opinionated. Martha expresses her difficulty with talking in class which is contrary to her rearing in the Lumbee community.

Just like when you're around just adults talking, they don't want children, you know, in the room, I mean, that right der may have something to do wid it too. You know, when parents expect you to be quiet—you be quiet. I don't know, I mean, so—I guess that's how I wuz raised.

Another salient topic in this discussion centered on their beliefs regarding interracial relationships on the campus. Ruth comments,

Another thing too—people don't understand—I'm not against marrying outside your race but at the same time, I try to stress to people dat when you do dat, you're depleting your tribe. That's how a lot of Indian tribes has ceased to exist because so many peoples married out into different races.

Naomi discusses her beliefs in interracial relationships.

We were raised to stay in your own race too and that's a big issue. Like my best friend that goes to ECU, her preference is not Indian guys and her parents do not like it at all. That's just how we were raised—Daddy always told me to stay in my race but when you come to a school like dis and you're expose to nothing but other cultures.

Many of the students explain that despite the difference beliefs of the diverse student populations on the campus, they do not question their value systems. This does not suggest that some Native students do not experience some level of assimilation but the

core values gained from their tribal elders remain intact for a number of student. For example, Naomi asserts,

Um, I think in my situation, I don't really feel—I guess I'm so rooted that I don't really let things get to me because I'm the type of person, I mean, I've been through a lot of things and I'm a strong person so a lot of outside does not influence me. That's how I feel.

Martha adds . . .

No matter what somebody says, I've always grew up from the kind of religion that I am to the culture and everything—nothing's gonna change my mind, I think that's cause how I grew up.

Naomi agrees, “I think that's strong Lumbee women for ya.” Samuel explains the diverse nature of higher education campus environment and that Native students must be conscious of this and inevitable exposure to diverse cultures.

It comes back to—yeah that wasn't how I was raised but I gotta realize that I'm gonna be exposed to those things and it just comes with the territory—going out—a different type of animal. We went from high school—coming to college and college is a different type of animal. We're gonna see things, we're gonna be exposed to some things that we've never seen before and it all comes back to the upbringing—it all comes back to our fundamentals of the way we've been raised. And yeah, this may not be (excuse me) this may not be the way I was raised but I'm gonna be exposed to it, I need to be prepared for it. I need to be ready because we're gonna see it.

Acting White. In some areas, there are undertones that equate postsecondary educational attainment of Natives attempting to “act White.” The students in this study share their views and experiences with these notions of what constitutes “acting White.” This particular discussion is relative to the cultural conflict in the Indian communities—

how Native college students are perceived by their family and friends who do not value postsecondary education.

Ruth states,

I mean, alot of peoplez in dis tiny bubble—too—sometimes from my daddy’s side of the family becuz alot of dem didn’t get the education like on my mother’s side of the family, they try to make smart comments like, ‘Oh, you’re tryin’ to be like a White person now,’ or you know, ‘You’re wantin’ to act like a White person now.’ It’s not actin’ like a White person, I see it’s just doin’ what you’re suppose to do, you know. I said, ‘If I want to be able to take care of my family and household and provide for my family like I would like to, dis is whatcha got to do.’ I said, ‘You can sit back and do whatcha want to do—hang sheetrock all day but da way da economy iz and sell drugs all day but the way da economy iz, when you retire whatcha gonna do?’ I said, ‘If you don’t have good churdren to take care of ya, which more than likely their’re not, you’re gonna be clipped and then if you’re gonna be dependent on the governmunt, you fastforward thirty years, Social Security and all—dats not gonna be—dats gonna be depleted.’ So alot of peoplez gonna see dat -der just gonna be hopeless.

The perception in the Lumbee community is that the use of proper grammar is a representation of White culture and often Indians are chastised for abandoning their culture to “act White.” However, American Indians who recognize proper grammar is a necessity for college degree attainment, coach their children in the value of discerning when it is acceptable to speak in their tribal dialect and when proper grammar is required.

Ruth shares such a discussion she had with her father,

One day Dr. Jacobs was talking about Lumbee language and I had raised my hand and said summin and then she used me for an example. ‘You hear the way RC talks, we’re gonna get into dat.’ And I said, ‘Oh, Lord.’ Cause my daddy’s always told me, ‘Now when you go to college, you can’t be sayin’ widja and over yonder and com hea and stuff like dat because people’s gonna look atcha and think you’re a hick and I’m like, ‘Well, I can talk like this if I’m at home but when I go to school, I’m learned now, you know, I’ve got to be professional for people to

take me serious and sometimes its hard because being from Prospect, mine's, you know, deeper, and so sometimes I do get tied on my words—studder or whatever but I mean, I'm learning to control it but at the same time, you know, it's kinda hard.'

Students like Ruth believe degree attainment and even learning to control their Lumbee dialect in particular situations does not in any way represent a compromise to their Native heritage. In their view, postsecondary education is the gateway to the life their parent's desire for them.

Matthew explains his perceptions of "acting White,"

I ain't never felt required [to act White] but people from my understanding—I feel like people who choose the White ways as the way they dress, the type of music they listen to, the kinda car—like they want to live nice. I don't believe in the saying, "acting White"—I just believe that people's got goals that they want to meet and they want to achieve and society sets goals so we can achieve'em and whereas Lumbee People when they say "acting White" or anything like that der—I feel like they're just downgrading theirselves because just because they ride a bike or their car isn't new as the other—doesn't mean they're acting White just because somebody is trying to do good for theirselves. It's more or less that they're trying to get a better education so they can support their families and provide for them.

The students in this study acknowledge there are values that govern the university campus culture and that there are occasions when their tribal culture comes in conflict and they must make a decision to assimilate for the purpose of achieving their goals. It is during these times when their Native culture seems to be challenged that Indian students seek support mechanisms or driving forces to counter any negative feelings that may compromise their goal attainment. This next section will describe some of the major themes gleaned from the Talking Circle discussions.

Support mechanisms or driving forces.

Self-determination/desire to be an example. A part of each Talking Circle discussion centered on the factors that attributed to the persistence of these students in their path to degree attainment. This section will focus on some of the primary elements that these students ascribe to their college retention. The first of these is a compilation of internal attributes, prevalent in the Lumbee community, that foster their persistence. The participants cite self-determination—the internal desire that drives them toward their goals despite external barriers and hindrances. Aligned with this internal factor is the desire to be an example which will manifest in the achievement of established goals and in this case—degree attainment. Samuel describes these internal factors as “will power and discipline.” Despite the wordage, these students describe an element, deep in their soul, that motivates them to achieve.

Ruth describes a legacy established by her ancestors that she intends to continue despite obstacles she may experience along the way—

I look at the struggle and stuff that my ancestors—my family on my mother’s side had went through to stress education—Preston, WL Moore, Early Bullard—that was my grandpa’s daddy and he was a judge and my mother—being a dentist. And so education, on the Bullard side of the family is like real important. You’ve got to have an education. It’s—I mean, there’s church and church is first but then there’s education. If you ain’t got an education, they’d tell you can’t do nothing or be nothing in life because my momma always told me that, ‘Knowledge is power.’ And you can have all the common sense in the world—you know and what ever but if you ain’t got books sense to know what you’re talking about and anybody can get on ya—ya know. So, I mean, by them—I just knew that in honor of that family and all dat dey have done, that I had to continue that legacy on for my children and set the examples my brothers and sisters.

Martha also shares her thoughts on the value of self-determination—

You have to be determined, there's no, I mean, you can get involved in stuff out here that you wish you'd never got involved in and I know because like I said, some friend dat I have out here -they wish that they'd changed—they wished they'd straightened up their freshman year and now they're behind because they didn't so I think it's a big transition. You have to—when you get to college—you have to be determined, you have to be determined to do your school work, you have to be determined not to get in stuff that you shouldn't get into.

Mary references on many occasions in the discussions that she was disappointed with her “college experience” at UNC Pembroke because of her lack of connection. However, her persistence to continue was significantly stronger than her desire to quit.

Mary states,

I think my expectations for college were really different and then when I got out here and noticed—you become immune to it and you just come out here and do whatcha gotta do. You just accept it because you're too far in it to turn around now.

Esther shared this sentiment to quit the first year. Her inability to feel connected to the campus—engaging in the monotonous routine of going to class and going home—was a distressing time for her. So much so that she entertained the notion of not returning.

[Y]ou're just doing it—just to be doing it and so after a while and what's the point of even coming and so some could quit. I thought dat at one time during that first year—just to quit. [And what changed your mind?] Oh well, I weren't gonna quit. I'm the type that I don't give up that easy and so I pushed through it and eventually it worked out.

She adds, “I've got little brothers and sisters that I've got to set that example for them too.”

Faculty support/engagement. There were some of the participants who found significant value in the encouragement of faculty and staff on the campus. The ability to interact with faculty outside the classroom setting fostered these relationships that served as a support mechanism for many of the students. Esther fondly cites one particular professor that inspired her to persist after she became actively involved in scientific research projects during her sophomore year.

Esther states,

Well, definitely, of people, Dr. Mandjiny—he was a BIG inspiration to stay. Um, I was constantly talking to him and he would really inspire me. Again, working with—working in the labs—I was constantly with the faculty so they really helped. Tutoring—that’s another factor that helped.

Similarly, Ruth describes the connection with faculty in the Department of American Indian Studies that she did not find when she was majoring in Psychology. That faculty connection has improved her all-around performance.

I am doing way better in school since I switched from Psychology to American Indian Studies. Well, like I said, the first three years, I wuz working and really sick. I didn’t have as much time to study, um, the psychology—I didn’t study for it like I should. I mean, I knew the stuff but it’s like—the way the tests were set up and I weren’t that involved with the faculty in Psychology neither but when I started taking American Indian Studies classes because I grew up listening to stories so I already knew half the mess we were learning and um, I just, I don’t know—with like—American Indian Studies faculty, I have a more close relationship with them personally—on a name to name basis and I can go to them and stuff compared to Psychology where there’s so many students, you know, but I mean, I’m enjoying it.

Naomi shares the sentiment—

I think one of the main thang is gettin' help from some of my professors. If I didn't know something in class, I would go to my professor's office and have a one-on-one conversation wid him about what I didn't understand.

The marketing slogan for UNCP is “Where Learning Gets Personal” and these students can attest to that with their accolades for some of the campus faculty. With a low student-faculty ratio and class size, students at UNCP have a greater access to develop sound relationships with faculty than they would at our flagship institutions like UNC Chapel Hill or North Carolina State University. Martha describes the relationships that she have developed with faculty during her time at UNCP.

I'm close to all my teachers, um, and they are different races—most of'em are different races—Actually, I'll probably cry when I leave because I'm close to'em. But they've helped me a lot too. Because if I always need help with something—no matter what it was—I can go to their office . . .

A significant factor to developing these supportive relationships with faculty is that the student must be willing to seek the assistance they require. This is not to say that faculty are not attune to the needs of their students but it is less likely that the faculty member will initiate the one-on-one contact unless the student appears to be in an academic crisis.

Family—A facilitator. The dialogue that focused on the value of family was by far most prevalent among any other element in the Talking Circle sessions. In this section, the student narratives depict a clear representation of the importance of family in the tribal community and in their decision to remain in college despite challenges or obstacles. Many students describe situations in which, family members who were unable

to even finish high school, are their primary advocates. Matthew is the only student in the group who is a first-generation college student. The other students have parents or siblings who completed undergraduate and graduate programs. Some of these students have ancestors who have monumental histories in fighting for education in the Lumbee community. These students are committed to continuing that legacy—and they believe the support of family is a contributing factor to achieving that goal.

Luke shares with the group how his grandmother has been his motivation for persisting even when he experienced difficulty.

My grandmother, she was born into a sharecropping family, and um, she had always told me all my life that, ‘If I’d had the opportunity to go to school, I wouldda went.’ But you see, she didn’t get that opportunity, she ended up quttin’ school, I believe, when she was in the 6th grade—just to work—to tend to the farm and um, she ended up gettin’ married when she was 18 and uh, she still farmed for two years but she and my grandfather got married and then she went to Converse to start workin’—as a matter of fact, that’s when she got her first license when she’s about twenty-some years old—just so she could go back and forth to work. But she’s always pushed education on me because she didn’t have the opportunity to get it like she wanted to. To this day, she’s kinda embarrassed because she really can’t read all dat well and she has me to help her out and she’s like—‘You know, I wish I could’ve went to school and everythang so I could’ve learn how to read and write better.’ But that’s the reason she had to really be my biggest motivation, I mean, there’s been times when I worked at Campbell Soup, when I got dat job offer, dey um, I mean my parents even said, ‘Maybe you want to just start working, I mean, it’s a job, you know.’ But my grandma never doubted me, you know, she’s always been der to help me. She’s even helped me from time to time to buys books sometimes too. I know one semester I needed to borrow some money for some—for the tuition out here and she let me borrow da money. So, she’s always been my biggest motivation.

Esther adds . . .

My dad comes from a big family, there’s like nine of’em and maybe like two of’em went to college and so education is the big thang for him. He sees how

things are now and if you don't have an education then there's a possibility you could not get a job. My mom, her family's small, but she's the only child that went to college and she quit early and so she's really pushing us to finish. She regrets doing it and um, she, uh, she doesn't want anything to get in our way—like marriage, boyfriends, girlfriends and she wants us to focus on school and finish and do what we want to do.

Mom and Dad were very supportive, I mean, they would've been shocked if I would've quit the first year. They really pushed me to go on and finish.

Ruth shares—

I look at the struggle and stuff that my ancestors—my family on my mother's side had went through to stress education—Preston, WL Moore, Early Bullard—that was my grandpa's daddy and he was a judge and my mother—being a dentist. And so education, on the Bullard side of the family is like real important. You've got to have an education. It's—I mean, there's church and church is first but then there's education. If you ain't got an education, they'd tell you you can't do nothing or be nothing in life because my momma always told me that, 'Knowledge is power.' And you can have all the common sense in the world—you know and what ever but if yo aint got books sense to know what you're talking about and anybody can get on ya—ya know. So, I mean, by them—I just knew that in honor of that family and all dat dey have done, that I had to continue that legacy on for my children and set the examples my brothers and sisters.

In a final question, the students were asked to identify factors they believe attribute to the persistence in college. The following represent some of these closing remarks and most highlight on the support of their families. Samuel shares a list of some of the factors that contributed to his success—success as defined by persistence to his senior year.

He states,

Um—contributing to my success? Definitely I'ma go list order here. I would say #1—My God, my belief in God, my faith in Him #1 has just drove me. Many times when I wuz weak, you know, I know some people don't want to add the religious aspect to it but dats #1 for me because I really couldn't see how I could've made it this far without God on my side and without God leadin' my life

and everythang that I've accomplished so far is thanks to Him—praise to Him. I'd say #2 would be blessing me wid godly parents that instilled my morals—they placed my morals and values high above standard. They didn't want me to have nothing less—they gave me the moon to shoot for as far as goals—just things I wanted to achieve. I would say 3 would definately have to be—willpower and discipline. I say dat and it sound contradicting because I said I never opened a book until my second year—I say dat as far as knowin' what I had to do and den me doin' it. I knew even if I didn't study as much, I knew I had to pass and I knew I had to accomplish dis so I'd say willpower and discipline. I'd say #4 would be connecting wid people and connecting wid different friends becuz I'll give you an example, you never know who you may meet may help you. I wuz in a class—political science class—my junior year—my sophomore year—and I didn't know nobody in da class at da time. It was a general ed for me. And I just connected wid dis fellow dat wuz wid me and uh, got da talkin' wid him. Turns out, he wuz a political science major, towards the end he wuz one of the smartest in da class—dat knew everything about anything in political science and so me connecting wid him and making friends wid him (chuckle)—I had a study partner who knew everything. And I also made—first of all I made a friend because of the connection that we made, I had literall a study partner who helped me pass that class—who helped me, gave me study guides—helped create study guides that helped me pass, helped me see—helped me get an 'A' outta dat class. So I would say dats dat order for me.

Lydia states, “I go home every day and I have my family and my church and the community and they support me and encourage me. And I don't need these other people.”

John, following in his brother's footsteps, also cites family support as a significant factor in his desire to persist to graduation. He states,

My family—well, my brother was really the first one to go to school and dem come here and I've always felt dat if I was gonna come to school—well, I never felt like if I wuz because I wuz always expected to go to school. There weren't no if's, and's or but's about it. But my momma worked hard and my daddy worked hard—my grandparents never had an education and they were like, ‘Look, you're gonna do dis because you're gonna have it better than we had it.’

Martha is the only married student in the group and she shares that her husband is very supportive of her educational goals. He is prompt to contribute extra attention to the household duties when necessary.

She states,

He's very supportive. I'm a senior now so I have a lot more studyin' to do and he usually—he takes care of most of the stuff—like some nights I bes very stressed out because I have so much school work to do and stuff but since he's so supportive, it doesn't bother anythank.

Most of these students live as dependents in the home with their parents. For this reason, the nature of their support is more an understanding of what is expected. In instances where the parents make the monetary contributions to the student's education, the student has less independence in the decision of where to attend. For example, Mary, Naomi and Lydia were not afforded an opportunity to apply to other institutions. It was understood that they would enroll at UNC Pembroke. Naomi's comments suggest that her father is involved in every aspect of her college education.

She said,

Religion, um, strong family support—cuz even to this day, my daddy says, what's your schedule, what classes are you taking, where's your grades at. He keeps me on top of everything. And I think that if I'd stay off from home, I wouldn't be gettin' all of dat.

Mary asserts,

Going to college weren't never a question for me. It wuz always something I wuz expected to do and I wuz gonna do so it wuz never a question of was I going to college.

Similarly, Lydia, whose sister also attends UNCP, did not have a choice about where she would attend college. She implies by her comments that her father is a strict disciplinarian. Lydia states,

I came to Pembroke because it was convenient and my parents came here and I really didn't have a choice. Daddy wouldn't let me go off to school so I had to come to Pembroke.

Um, if I'd went off to school I'd had more freedom and I would've—I probably would not have did what I did or I would've had to come back home or something because I've never really had freedom. Daddy always tells us what to do and stuff like that.

The parents of these students also insist the grades are a reflection of their very best effort. Hannah describes how her parents set the standard for her performance in college. There is an understanding that she will perform at a level greater than just enough to get by.

Hannah said,

Um, then becuz of the way that they wuz raised, them pushing me all the time and saying in order for you to succeed you have to do stuff in this type of way—you have to study, you have to go to class, you cain't just sit around and do nothing and becuz of that—that wuz—and with my momma and daddy pushing me the way they were that's the reason why I have made it to my senior year—in four years.

Mark adds . . .

. . . I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my father who pays out of pocket for my tuition and for my mother who nags me and nags me and you know, I have all these people behind me saying that I can succeed and if it wasn't for them, there's no telling, you know, if it wasn't for them, I would settle just for a four-year

degree. I would probably even just settle for any kind of major so for me it would be—family support.

Luke also said,

I believe mine is multiple reasons, I mean, ever since I wuz young, education's always been pushed on me, you know—you've got to make all 'A's'. You know, you've got to make the Honor Roll. You've got to do dis —you've got to have a certain GPA. And that's been an important thang in my life and everything. But at the same time, I think family has also played an important—like my grandmother, she's just—she's always stayed on me—Letting me know how important it was and how she wanted me to graduate and another part of it is, you know, just self-awareness, I mean, it's obvious I didn't want to be like everybody else and maybe go to RCC, or go join the railroad—you know try something like that—do my own thang, I guess. I mean, I've had a lot of friends that leave from out here and go to RCC but I just want to challenge myself. That's one reason why I have a double major. I want to challenge myself.

Matthew, the only student with small children and the only first-generation college student in the group, says that his children are the driving force of motivation for his persistence toward a college education.

If it wasn't for my family and my kids, I'd still be here but my determination and motivation would probably be lower. I probably wouldn't care much about school but now—knowing that I've got to support my family in years to come—it's more about my future than the present.

Luke states—

I have a pretty large family, I mean, I live about ten minutes from here so I still stay at home and uh, during my whole time at UNCP, my family's been very supportive. I mean, you know, there has been alot of circumstances when I've thought about quittin' actually but uh, I know my grandmother's she's been my most—my main motivation for stickin' wid—stickin' wid school and tryin' to graduate and everything. My parents they've been there for me, I mean, they've always been very supportive too and even my brothers and sisters. My sister—she

wuz a junior out here whenever I started so she wuz very supportive—kinda gave me the ropes about college and everything and den whenever my brother started out here, I kinda gave him the ropes about UNCP, you know. So, it's been a—we've hadda a lot of family ties in it.

Family—A barrier. In the Lumbee community, the connection to family is an interwoven component of the tribal culture. The family, for these students, serves as a lifeline or facilitator of success for some—and for others, familial responsibilities and obligations may manifest as barriers to their college persistence. In the session with Matthew, the only first-generation student in the group, he describes the struggles he experienced while living in the home with his parents and trying to attend college at UNCP.

He states,

I know when I graduated high school, I was livin' wid my momma—basically—all my life until I turnt 18 and when I graduated high school, I moved out and I stayed wid my cuzin cause me and him worked and we went half on everything and the transition wid me movin' out and my momma didn't agree wid it because she wanted me to stay at home but I knew dat I needed to get away from home, in order to grow up and be more independent and me moving out, gettin' away from my family, helped me get through college because I know if I wuz at home, there would be problems at home that I'd have to be worried about, there'd be more stuff dat they wanted me to do that would take away from my time—me goin' to work and school wuz enuff. So, when I got off work, I could go home and get my homework done, I wouldn't have to go to my parents and talk to dem and talk to my sister and have to hear about what dey went through. It was easier for me just to leave home than it wuz to be at home because I know wid family dey bring more problems and they really don't realize what college is all about and what kind of work you have to do. Whereas sometimes, you'll have a test da next day and you'd want to study at night, and whereas when you're at home, people's always at your house doin' summin. Where me and my cousin, we both went to school and we helped each other out on work. Helped get through college easier.

The commitment to family does not change when a child moves from the home. Matthew describes his struggles with family issues even after he moved out of the family home.

Well my sophomore year, well, like the semester before the summer, at the end of May, my daddy started his own business but they filed bankruptcy and they lost their house and all dis here and I wuz still livin' wid my cuzin but knowin' dat dey lost der house affected me cause I had to help dem when I got outta work to move and dey had to do dis here so I pushed back school work even dough it was at da wrong time when I needed to be studyin' for the semester, I had to help dem move and dat der, helpin' dem, wuz a conflict wid my school and dey didn't understand dat I needed to do dis here in order to get dis school finished but dey were more worried bout derself—to help dem.

A follow-up question to Matthew was “Do you think they just did not understand the value associated with your pursuit of a college degree?” His response was—

Because everybody's basically—if somebody—if you can't help yourself, you can't help nobody else. But I look at it like dis, they wuz, dey had all der financial problems dat dey knew wuz goin' on, dey shoulda did summin' to dem—to help dem instead of tryin' to bring somebody else into it, dey should've took all dat care of because dey already knew dat dey already had kidz dat dey raized—I wuz in college and my sister—she wuz gettin' ready to graduate and she still lived der and I felt more for my sister dan my parents because she was still younger dan me and she wuz der and she weren't able to provide for herself and git out so I felt dat it wuz up to me to help dem get outta der situation—to help dem in der situation so I pushed school aside to help dem.

Basically, families in the Lumbee community depend on each other and the expectation is that when you need help—you can always count on family to come to your aid. Ruth suggests this intense commitment to family is a cultural distinction of the Lumbee community.

Ruth states,

Alot of people are leavin' school and mess but I think da reason for dat is because of da economy gettin' bad because I've known alot of students dats had to drop out to help der family—take care of der grandmother and stuff like dat and you see deeze Black and White people, dey don't take care of der grandparents and stuff like dat. Not sayin' all of'em don't butcha know der're not close to der family like we are.

Now that Matthew has children of his own, he schedules his classes in such a way as to provide for the maximum amount of time with his family. His familial commitments not only delineate his class schedule but also limit his involvement in extra-curricular activities on the campus.

Well, in high school, I wuz involved but in college I do nothing but in high school, I wuz vice president for two years of FFA, NASA, AISES—I did all da Native American stuff. I got to go on trips like to Canada one year with AISES and NASA and my sophomore, junior and senior year of high school in FFA, I got to go to Kentucky, Indianapolis—I went to State (NC State) and I went to camps where I got to college, I wuz more about tryin' to meet gurls and hang out wid people whereas everybody sayz you're gonna meet your wife when you go to college and all dis here and where academics, I've always did academics because I know dat's gotta be done because I know dat's a requirement. Whereas, basically I have not involvement on campus other than my family—now that they've came along, I just come to school because class is offered at dis time and I need it for my major so I come to class and I leave. Other than dat, I have no involvement on campus.

The death of a family member, whether mother or grandfather, had a significant impact on some of the students in this study. Naomi describes how her life has changed since the passing of her mother during her sophomore year in college. The sickness of her mother and her familial obligations directed her decision to stay home to help with the family instead of going away to college.

Naomi states,

I stay wid my daddy and my baby sister and my baby brother so I'm da oldest and I—as far as—2009, my sophomore year, I had to take on the motherly role because my mother passed away wid breast cancer so I had dat on me.

. . . [M]y momma was going through chemo and stuff at the time and so, I didn't want to cause a burden on the family and so my daddy already told me—he was like, 'Go ahead and apply to UNCP because you know that's where you're goin' so that's where I applied.

Similarly, familial obligations in the form of sick parents, was a factor in Samuel's decision to enroll at UNC Pembroke instead of other choices that he may have been afforded. His father completed a Master's program in the School of Education at Harvard but despite the opportunity, his commitment to care for his sick parents was the major factor he considered in the college application process.

I had three different choices—I had, um, my father always told me, 'Now if you want to go to Harvard, just give me the application but I wasn't ready to go to Harvard, of course, Pembroke, Chapel Hill—North Carolina, Chapel Hill—I wanted to go there but I decided it was best to—let me re-track that—Chapel Hill and the Marines. I had the opportunity to go to the Marines—I had the test passed and everything. It was one of those things—it was like, I had a different calling somewhere else and I can use my skills better to help the world and help my community—it's coming to Pembroke which was ultimately the best option because it was close to home, my mother and father were very sick at the time. My father's still very sick. My mother—at the time of me applying to—coming to Pembroke, she broke her elbow and now she only has only 30% use of his arm so it was like. I can go away or I can stay and help with the family, help with the community, my church involvement or get my education here. The Teacher Education program here is like #1 in North Carolina. See, that was what I was going for to be the, you know, you can have the best of both worlds and it cheaper and you get just as good uh education.

Campus Involvement.

Work study. The students describe the factors that impact their involvement on the university campus. Some of these elements, like participation in work study programs, may foster their campus involvement. While on the other hand, many students suggest that a combination of familial obligations, work schedules and their position as a commuter may actually impede their ability to be more active in campus activities. A number of the students cite work study as an important factor contributing to their increased involvement on the campus. Work study moved them away from the repetitiveness associated with being a commuter—simply attending classes. Esther, for example, describes her struggles during the first year. The process of coming to class and going home did not facilitate her connection with the college experience but she acknowledges the change that occurred during her sophomore year when she was awarded work study. She moved from hating to come to school and contemplating quitting to loving school.

She states,

Well, I guess when you're not involved, I mean, you're going just to be going. When you're more involved, it's like you're wanted. You feel like you're wanted. Like in the sophomore year, I got work study so I wuz in the chemistry labs, I wuz constantly wid faculty, constantly wid students. I mean, I felt like I wuz wanted. I felt like I was used—like I wuz a part of da campus environment and so dat helped change a lot.

Esther elaborates,

My freshman year, like I had said before, I would come to class. I wasn't involved in social events; I didn't go to sport activities. I just mainly go to school, come to

class and go home and after that first, my freshman year, I didn't like it cause I wuz like counting days down to when the semester would end. But den my second year, I got awarded work study and I started working in the chemistry lab and I LOVED IT. I would go to school and I would look forward to doing stuff like dat and so it just changed me. I just loved doin' it.

Impact of being a commuter. A number of the study participants cite commuting as a barrier to enjoying the “college experience” and thus attributing to drop out events but Mary suggests that living on campus may often be a hindrance for Native students. It is her belief that the home environment does not provide the distractions that students experience by living in campus housing.

She asserts,

You see if you went off to school to place like Chapel Hill or NC State, I have to deal with all these extra things going on but I don't have to deal with anything [by attending UNCP] because nothing in my life has changed. This is just something that I have to do so I think that's why we excel. [By staying here] I didn't have to adjust—it's just something that I had to do. And there's other things that I don't have to deal wid—I don't have to deal wid people in my dorm—blowing me up or wantin' to party or wantin' to do other stuff. Now, if I do it, I do it—if I don't, I don't. It's my choice. I'm not pressured to do anythang because I'm not on campus and your parents expect you to live your life and help around da house and come home and do stuff so you don't really the leisure of actually being involved and doin' oder stuff.

On the other hand, she believes that commuting facilitates a routine that does not easily allow students to become connected to the campus environment and campus living provides opportunities to establish bonds with other students that may not be facilitated in the classroom setting.

Mary says,

I feel like when you're in high school, you've got to go to school every day from 8 to 3—there's no escape. So you've got to make yourself known and you have to participate in stuff but because I'm a commuter, I don't have to make myself known—I don't have to do anythang because at da end of da day, I don't enjoy da benefits because I go home so what's da point in making friends cause I'm not gonna have to hang wid'em tonight or what's da point of me involved on campus because I don't have to. It's not something that I have to do.

It is Mary's perception that commuters do not enjoy the full college experience similar to her friends who left the county to attend UNC Chapel Hill and NC State and reside on campus.

A heritage of persistence. Since colonization of English settlers, American Indians have recognized the value of adapting to their environment for the purpose of surviving and maintaining their cultural heritage. Cobb (1992) presents a similar survival story for the Chickasaw and their realization that to continue as an Indian nation, they must adopt norms and values of the Anglo-Saxons to maneuver in mainstream society. Similarly, the oral histories of the Lumbee People are a collection of survival stories that describe a tribe making necessary adaptations to maintain their position on their land. The study participants, continuing this legacy of survival, attest to a foundation in family and culture that sustains their existence and persistence in mainstream higher education.

Establishing a goal of degree attainment required necessary adaptive behavior that these students recognized would position them to successful achievement without compromising or abandoning elements of their tribal culture as suggested in Tinto's (1993) three-stage model. Discussions with the students did not suggest that temporary

adaptive behavior should or was associated with a compromise to the tribal heritage and culture. Conversely, a number of students acknowledged their obligation to making these necessary adjustments for the purpose of honoring their ancestors through their successes. At the core of this survival, family remained the sustaining influence for each student. The participants described the value in establishing a support system of family, friends and faculty and staff on the UNCP campus. Developing and maintaining supportive community bonds is a cultural trait indicative of Lumbee People. Hence, building and sustaining similar communal bonds in the campus environment was a necessary component for survival.

For most of these students, their experiences on the UNCP campus represented a realization of difference from the mainstream society. Many describe childhoods insulated from difference—reared in communities and schools where they were members of the dominant group. This shift in membership to a subordinate group was a significant transition for most in their study. The prejudice and discrimination associated with membership in this new community did not deter these students from persisting to their goal attainment. In retrospect, the willingness and determination dogged to persist, notwithstanding the associated challenges, is simply another manifestation of their tribal heritage—as passed down from their ancestors. For this reason, a model to examine the persistence of American Indian college students must incorporate the element of culture for proper applicability to examine the experiences of Native students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I will return to the focal point of this research with the pending question—Does Tinto’s Interactionalist’s theory serve as an appropriate model for gauging the persistence behavior of American Indian college students in mainstream higher education? Based upon the principle findings of this study; I believe that it is critical and necessary to use Native student narratives in order to more fully understand and appreciate the more salient factors necessary to examine this question. Understanding the fundamental factors that validate the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream higher education must always serve as the bedrock for examining the application of retention and graduation theories to this and other minority college student populations. In this chapter, I will be examining in detail the formation of these formative themes supported by existing research literature and Tinto’s work.

An important caveat to this discussion is the definition of the term “academic success” as it applies to these particular students. The nature and measure of success is inherently ambiguous and a plethora of terms can rightly be employed to define this term “success.” For the purpose of the Talking Circle conversations held with the student participants, we defined success as persistence to graduation. It should be noted that at the time of these sessions, all students were on track to complete their respective degree program requirements in either the Fall 2011 or Spring 2012 semesters. Without question,

unforeseen circumstances could certainly impede their path to degree attainment but let us adopt an optimistic viewpoint and assume such events are highly unlikely.

The primary categories and themes that emerged from the Talking Circle sessions frame the foundation for discussing and analyzing the various findings of this study. These include the categories: Transitioning to College, Campus Culture, Cultural Conflict, Support Mechanisms/Driving Forces and Campus Involvement. These particular themes stem from discussion questions, which related to elements of Tinto's three-stage model of college integration—Separation, Transition, and Incorporation.

Transitioning to College

Pipeline Issues

The discussions among educators in secondary and post-secondary venues today focus on the need for a seamless pipeline from high school to college. This is particularly relevant in Indian Country as Native students historically have the lowest college enrollment rates among all other racial/ethnic groups. As previously stated in this study, the history of American Indian education is characterized by the continued struggle to gain control of the education of Native children. As administrations change in the White House, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bureau of Indian Education, the crisis in Indian education remains at the forefront of tribal concerns. Ongoing discussions with tribal leaders, calling for substantial improvements in Indian education, remain a constant for the Obama Administration. Therefore, under a directive memorandum from President Obama, the Department of Education has conducted the first series of consultations with American Indian/Alaska Native tribal leaders and educators in the United States to

develop action plans to improve the quality of educational attainment for Indian youth. Testimonies from Native leaders and educators centered on numerous issues that often impede the educational attainment of Indian students.

Evidence of these discussions was released in a report by the Department of Education entitled *Tribal Leaders Speak: The State of Indian Education, 2010*. This report is a representation of months of open dialogue between the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan; his senior staff and tribal leaders across the country. The Department of Education's action plan for establishing more collaborative relationships with tribal leaders centered on these four overarching themes:

- The U.S. recognizes the right of federally recognized Indian tribes to self-government, and supports tribal sovereignty and self-determination;
- In general, this right forms the basis of every federal policy or program that has tribal implications;
- Regular and meaningful dialogue is the appropriate vehicle for ensuring that this right is reflected in federal policies and programs; and
- The Department's role is to ensure that the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives are met (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, pp. 4-5).

Among the myriad topics of discussion aimed to confront the crisis in Indian education were suggestions to address the historic lack of collaboration between tribal leaders and the Department of Education, the perceived failures of the federal government in fulfilling their obligation to provide the basic services such as quality

healthcare and education in exchange for the use of American Indian land and the insufficient funding available to tribal communities to provide quality education for Native student populations. One of the more pressing issues shared by tribal leaders was the need for a seamless cradle-to-career pipeline. Gloria Kitsopoulos, Administrator, American Horse School, argues, “We need to start with early childhood and complete at college” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 40).

Renee Hammonds, from the Early College High School, gives the following testimony on behalf of the challenges experienced by Native students in Robeson County, North Carolina.

Money isn’t the solution to declining test scores, increased dropouts among males or lack of teacher ability to reach or teach an Indian student. . . . 1) Have high expectations for Indian students although they may be “at risk” (stop labeling students) and hold the students to these expectations; 2) Treat Indian students as potential college students; 3) Work from their strengths individually as well as collectively; 4) Do what you say you are going to do to gain the trust of both student and parent; 5) Teach students their individual learning style and how to use that style to gain new knowledge and make learning easier (refer to this style often); 6) Perform a career assessment on each student—share this with the student and revamp as needed as the student matures; 7) Teach the essentials: become an independent adult, timeliness, organizational skills, problem-solving skills, self-advocacy skills, decision-making skills; 8) Do not patronize these students just because their life or family is bad. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 42)

As evident from testimonies of tribes across the nation—Navajo, Tulalip, Tlingit Haida Indian tribes of Alaska and the Lumbee from Robeson County, North Carolina, tribal leaders are calling—even demanding—that the federal government address expediently the crisis of the inadequate academic preparation that Native children receive in

mainstream public education. The following summation delineates the concerns of the tribal leaders on this pipeline issue:

Tribal officials and American Indian educators indicate that a failure to provide a seamless cradle-to-career education that takes into account student life challenges and cultural relevancy prevents schools from conveying these students from early learning to higher education. They indicate that an unbroken pipeline from early learning to career is necessary to foster historically disadvantaged students' educational success. The absence of such a coordinated cradle-to-career —pipeline, they believe, ultimately perpetuates a cycle of poverty and socioeconomic inequality for American Indian communities. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 40)

Nearly one century ago, Lewis Meriam was commissioned in 1938 by the U.S. Department of Interior to examine the state of American Indian education and the deficits in the education of Native students that were reported then are among the discussions in this report commissioned by yet another federal agency. The only difference here is that the Obama Administration did incorporate the voices of tribal leaders in this discussion—but was anyone listening? Perhaps only time will answer this question.

Inadequate Academic Preparation

Patterns of nonpersistence among Native college students resulting from inadequate academic preparation are well documented in the literature (CHiXapkaid & Inglebret, 2007; Huffman, 1993, 1999, 2001; Jackson et al., 2003; Lin, 1985; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Scott, 1986; Wells, 1997). Without question, Native and non-Native scholars alike agree that academic preparedness is one of the most significant factors attributing to the persistence patterns of all college students. Accordingly, Tinto's (1975) work aligns with this research, in that, college students, including American

Indian college students, enter college with a number of characteristics that impact the decision and even the ability to persist to degree attainment. Academic ability is one of the attributes that Tinto suggests may impact the college student departure process.

Based on these discussions, this theory is certainly applicable to the American Indian students at UNCP. The overwhelming consensus among participants in this study is that their high school preparation was inadequate for transition to the academic requirements of a college setting. This realization was a direct result of their growing familiarization with these academic requirements. The most significant areas of deficiency, as cited by these students, are writing skills and the development of appropriate study habits.

A deeper aspect garnered from the discussion of the student's writing skills is the role of tribal dialect in their ability to write in a manner and style acceptable to the mainstream campus culture, principally White faculty members. During the course of their enrollment at UNC Pembroke, the overwhelming shared experience of the Lumbee students from the local area is a tale of receiving their first harshly graded written assignment, which was covered in red pen ink. John and Naomi discussed reaching the realization, either by discussions with a faculty member or a failing grade on a writing assignment that it was simply unacceptable to write in the same manner which they spoke.

Lumbee Dialect

The members of the Lumbee Nation residing in Robeson County and the surrounding area speak a variation of English distinct to the Tribe. Despite our very

strong tribal heritage, the Lumbee do not have a history of the ancestral language similar to many of the other federally recognized tribes in the United States. This stereotypical designation of true native heritage has been the source of contention in many debates surrounding the Tribe's effort to gain federal recognition. For the Lumbee people, this tribal dialect is indeed our native language and a unique identifier that "Lums" (term used to identify members of the Tribe) employ to establish bonds of kinship with others.

Walt Wolfram, William C. Friday Distinguished University Professor at North Carolina State University and Director of the North Carolina Language and Life Project (NCLLP), conducted studies in the Lumbee community to better define the culturally specific speech patterns of the Lumbee. Wolfram, who has pioneered research on social and ethnic dialects since the 1960s and published more than 20 books and over 300 articles, has documented that there are syntactic specifics such as past tense "be" leveling and the perfective "I'm" that distinguish "Lumbee English" from any other dialect spoken in Southeastern North Carolina.

According to Wolfram and Sellers (1999), the finite "be" (e.g., Dey bes justa sittin' 'round smokin' and drinkin') serves as an "ethnolinguistic marker" because the Lumbee are the only group in Robeson County to use it in speech. Another feature unique to Lumbee is the perfective I'm (e.g., When I'm done wid school, I go home) (Wolfram, 1996). Wolfram's collaborative projects with people from Robeson County include publications and documentary films intended to educate the general public in the historical background and cultural value of the Lumbee dialect to the Tribe. The unfortunate aspect of these resources is that many never gain access to this knowledge,

particularly, newcomers to the UNCP campus. If not for guided tours of the Native American Resource Center on the UNCP campus, many from outside the community function in their ignorant stereotypes of the tribal dialect which is most often equated to a lack of intelligence or simple ignorance of proper English language usage. Despite the efforts of scholars like Walt Wolfram whose work supports the validity of the Lumbee dialect, Lumbees, particularly on the UNCP campus, are subject to prejudice. This discrimination is perpetuated by those in mainstream society who challenge the validity of this distinct English vernacular as a legitimate element of Lumbee culture.

I have come to realize in my role in mainstream higher education that this element of my tribal culture will be questioned, challenged and even the object of prejudice by many who are ignorant of our native heritage. What is very frustrating is that when our Navajo brothers or sisters (or for that matter, any Native person with a distinct tribal language) open their mouth to speak in their ancestral tongue, is the validity of this component of their tribal heritage challenged? I would say that many but certainly not all Lumbee students at UNCP have learned this part of their heritage is unacceptable and many learn to survive in the campus culture, they must learn to suppress this element of their tribal culture. How can you turn off a part of your culture? To answer that question—some cannot and these students are the individuals who struggle with their writing.

I knew there were Eurocentric elements of field research that I would have to abandon to get these students to speak freely. One minor issue was recording field notes in the session. This common practice was quickly abandoned. I believe it is disrespectful

to the students to be distracted from their discussions to jot down notes during the sessions—so I did not take any notes until after the sessions were over. The major issue is that I did not enter the field in my role as a researcher. As facilitator of these Talking Circle sessions, my position as a member of the Lumbee Tribe was at the forefront and for this reason, I was not as cautious in regard to masking my dialect as I would be in teaching my classes or conducting a meeting or workshop with faculty colleagues. I spoke freely in my tribal dialect and as a result, so did those students, like Naomi, who was willing to share that she has also developed the dialect “masking skills” during her time at UNCP.

During these last few years, in the role of a faculty member and doctoral student, it has been a very long time since my writing has been a reflection of the manner in which I speak. For this reason, it was a challenge to transcribe the students’ dialogue in the Lumbee dialect but I exercised great care to type every word exactly as it was spoken. As a university faculty member, I understand there is an expectation that proper English governs mainstream higher education and as such, our distinct variation of that is considered unacceptable. In pages of this study, there is a place of honor for our Lumbee dialect. In my follow-up correspondence with the study participants, I was forthright in the request that they not modify their transcribed comments for grammar. In the email, I said, “Der’s no red pen gonna touch deese comments.” In later discussions, some students expressed their surprise as to the “thickness” of their dialect in the sessions and I simply reassured them that this was part of their culture and certainly not due apologies. As a Native faculty member, it is my practice to take students enrolled in my classes to the

Native American Resource Center where I request that one of the components of the tour is the film on our tribal dialect so that I may provide students with an appreciation for the Lumbee culture. In my role as mentor to Native students, I inculcate the value of learning to control their dialect and discern in which occasions it is appropriate as well as those in which it is not. In this respect, I have learned language and dialect modulation is vital to persist (i.e. survive) in mainstream higher education.

Tinto's First Separation Stage

An additional factor to surface from the discussion of transitioning to college was the nature of the student's social connections, in particular, the social circles these students create and maintain following their enrollment at UNC Pembroke.

Overwhelmingly, the students indicated a change in their circle of friends since high school. This was most evident for those individuals whose friends did not elect to pursue college after high school. Ruth shared that she was the only person, from her high school circle of friends, to attend college. Luke described a similar change in the composition of young men in his social networks. It is not uncommon that the composition of friendship circles transforms with personal maturity and changes in lifestyle interests. For the students in this study who shared that their high school bonds had been severed since college enrollment, the consensus was that it became increasingly important that they encircle themselves with individuals who place a high value on a college education. They expressed the conflict associated with relationships with people who challenge the value of a college degree and more importantly, do not possess an awareness of the commitment necessary for degree attainment.

Antonio (2004) examines the influence of friendship groups on intellectual self-confidence and educational aspirations in college. Scholars cite peer groups as the dominant factor effecting college student development (Astin, 1977, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Moving beyond prior peer group studies as defined by campus associations, Antonio's research examines these interpersonal environments in terms of actual friendships and cliques and includes the factor of racial diversity and the impact on student development.

Antonio finds,

The positive effect of friendship-group diversity on intellectual self-confidence and (more tentatively) educational aspirations was found for students of color only, and the absence of a similar effect among white students can help us think about the relationship between diverse friendships and academic outcomes. In the realm of self-concept and aspirations, diversity may simply provide students—students of color—a normative context which contains more varied reference points from which to evaluate themselves. (Antonio, 2004, p. 465)

This research supports the opinions of the students in this study, in that, the supportive influence of friendship groups with shared educational aspirations have a positive effect on student development in the campus environment and therefore, students seek these enclaves of support in their efforts to attain their goals of college degree attainment.

Museus and Quaye (2009) also deduce,

. . . racial/ethnic minority undergraduates are more likely to succeed if the campus cultural agents to whom they are connected emphasize achievement, value attainment, and validate their cultural heritages. Indeed, participants highlighted the importance of cultural agents who validate their cultural identities. (p. 87)

An important component of Tinto's Separation stage is the separation from old norms and values and the adoption of the new norms and values associated with the new setting. For the students in this particular study, the realization of what is necessary to be successful in the college environment became clearly evident within their first year of enrollment. The former norms and values specifically relating to the amount of study time committed to their education became a component of their past community (high school) that was necessary to abandon.

Elkins, Braxton and James (2000) examine this first stage of Tinto's (1993) model (Separation) and the influence on the first-semester persistence of college students. Tinto's three-stage model of a college career begins with this Separation phase which he defines as a period in which the individual must disconnect from past communities such as family connections, local high school association, and community of residence. "[D]ifferences in individual goals and intentions have much to do with a person's response to the stress of transition" (Elkins et al., 2000, p. 98). The decision of these study participants to disconnect from high school friends who do not value a college education validates Tinto's formulations pertaining to high school associations. The effort necessary to maintain friendships with individuals who do not share these educational goals and the associated challenges can certainly compound the stress of the college environment.

However, the family and community connections are interwoven components of American Indian tribal culture and thus, for these students who remain in their native communities, this disconnection is not a consideration or possibility. This particular

element of Tinto's model suggests that students must abandon the norms and values associated with family and community. This specific element of his model does not align with the experiences of Indian students at UNCP—many of whom attend college in their home community. Even with students whose family who did not value education or for those in which familial responsibilities introduced “set-backs” in their progress, the possibility of disconnection from family was never an option these students mentioned. The concept of severing familial connections is never a reasonable consideration for Indian students because family ties, as revealed in this study, are an intricate component to tribal culture, and tribal culture is a critical component in the fabric of Indian student motivation and eventual success.

Campus Culture

Self-realization of Indianness. Tinto (1993) argues that a period exists between this separation from former associations and full acclimation and transition to the norms and values of the campus culture. The following section is an examination of how the norms and values of the campus culture conflict with the tribal culture of the Native students. There were some elements of the campus culture that surfaced during the Talking Circle sessions that challenge the cultural identity of the Indian students and many of these factors were not relevant to the participants until their enrollment at UNC Pembroke—a shift from an environment where they were in the ethnic/racial majority to the college campus where they find themselves considered the minority.

One of the more delicate and difficult themes in this discussion of campus culture centered around the issue of self-realization, particularly of the student's “Indianness.”

Like many of the experiences shared by these students, I could relate to this point in my life when my native culture was called to the forefront of my identity. In our tribal communities, we acknowledge that we are Lumbee and we do not spend time talking about the elements of our culture because those core elements are the same for most tribal members. Hannah said, “Around here—mostly all of the Native Americans have the same type of background—the same type, I guess, thinkin’.”

On the other hand, tribal culture as lived and represented by Lumbee students is not the norm outside of the tribe and elements that fashion our tribal identity are frequently challenged by mainstream society as in the discussion of the Lumbee dialect. Shotton et al. (2007) discuss the cultural conflict that exists for American Indian students attending predominantly White institutions. Eurocentric ideologies, like those that foster functioning independently, are in direct conflict with the values and norms associated with tribal communities. For example, the communal relationships in Indian communities do not foster the independent mentality prevalent on university campuses. Many of the students stressed the lack of community on the UNCP campus. It is these contrasting ideologies that highlight the notions of Indianness for American Indian students at UNCP and most often lead to feelings of alienation/isolation that are prevalent on a predominantly White college campus.

Alienation/on your own/no sense of community. Low self-esteem and feelings of alienation/isolation are among the social psychological difficulties that Native students often experience in college. Huffman (1999) cites alienation/isolation as a “primary and formidable barrier” to the success of American Indians in mainstream higher education

(p. 16). He acknowledges the challenges associated with measuring alienation/isolation but the students in this study equate alienation with the feelings of being on their own and the lack of community on the UNCP campus.

Ruth shares in one of the sessions,

A lot of these professors out here don't care two cents about a Native American student and you know it. Especially when I've been in classes and sometimes I'm the only Native American. I remember when I first started, um, there would be more Native Americans in my class. There weren't that many Blacks—just a few—and there's always been Whites and maybe two or three Asians but since like—until now—sometimes I'm the only Native American in class—half of it's Black—more Black students and the rest is White and more Asians.

The transition from a high school with 75–80 percent American Indian enrollment to a campus of near 6,500 and less than 20 percent is Native, is daunting task for these students. In the Talking Circle sessions, John made frequent references to “being all alone.” Additionally, almost every student shared at least one incident when they were the only Indian in a classroom setting. These feelings of “aloneness” were historically unfamiliar to the participants and introduced an awareness of difference unknown to nearly everyone except Mark—he attended a high school where he was the only Indian in his graduating class. To regain a sense of comfort, familiarity, and normality that many describe their practice of seeking other Native students to sit with in their classes, socialize with in the UC (campus game room), and other occasions on the campus.

This sense of connection with other Native students does not support Tinto's assertion that students' transition to the campus environment because the students continue the connections with their tribal community even on the campus setting.

Students like Naomi and Esther who have work study assignments on the campus have been forced to venture out of the comfort of their tribal community connections to interact and develop relationships with non-Native students, faculty, and staff. Luke describes the necessity to “come outta my shell” to meet other people because the number of Native students in the History department is limited. Matthew advises, “if we don’t adjust, we won’t make it.” The relatively low Native enrollments at UNCP remain a source of contention in the Lumbee community but educational attainment has become more of an expectation than an option for residents in Robeson County. This process of adjusting to their environment has become a strategy for Native students to move past their discomforts and be successful on a predominantly White campus. Our ancestors have survived for centuries by employing similar adaptive strategies.

Dealing with stereotypes/prejudice. The study participants describe events during their time on the campus when they experienced incidents of racial prejudice by non-Native faculty and staff. These conversations also included example of stereotypes associated with American Indians and the local Indian community. Ignorance of the Lumbee culture is one of the sources of stereotypes perpetuated by non-Native faculty and students on the campus. The stereotype associated with the Lumbee dialect as previously discussed is an example of the discrimination fostered by a lack of education and some would suggest simple ignorance. Ruth asserts that the campus administration should require courses in Lumbee history and culture as a component of the general education curriculum. “I just don’t think the college is doing like they should as far as bringing awareness about Native American culture to any of the students out here.”

Students attending UNCP, from outside the local community, possess a limited and largely erroneous knowledge of the Lumbee built on inaccurate and incomplete information. The failure to acknowledge the importance of educating students and the faculty in the rich tribal heritage of the local Indian community is a clear message of institutional complacency to American Indian students on the campus. Some of the students believe campus administration is supporting Lumbee culture just enough to avoid accusations of doing nothing.

One stereotype that the students discussed at length is that non-Native students and faculty assume Lumbee students have a predisposition to violence because rumors of such maintain a constant presence on the campus. There are ongoing accusations that “locals” are committing acts of violence against UNCP students. Campus administration does not provide any assistance in suppressing these rumors. For example, a campus-wide email was originated by a member of the Campus Police staff to alert UNCP of an incident of violence that occurred around 3:20am. The email reads, “The suspects were described as three males being from the local community. No further description. The victim reported that no weapon was involved.” What characteristics designate an individual from the local community? If we assume these males were Indian, the question remains what characteristics identify them as locals?

The Campus Police department is certainly obligated to alert the campus community of alleged crimes on the campus but how many of the near 7,000 individuals who received this email will automatically assume, “Those Indians are out there robbing UNCP students again”? Some would dismiss the inadequate description as just a simple

lack of information but for our Indian students, these undertones of discrimination perpetuate the negative stereotypes that they must contend with on the UNCP campus. In mainstream society, there is such a lack of knowledge as to what exactly constitutes racism that people are blithely unaware of how simple acts such as this email might continue a cycle of discrimination against a group of people. The sad part of this email incident is that the gentleman from Campus Police who composed the email is a local Native male so he is contributing to a cycle of negativity against his own people.

In one of the Talking Circle sessions, John expresses his frustration with the stereotypes assigned to him as a result of rumors of violence from the Indian community.

I sit in class and there are some people that I hate to have in class because, they're—if they make any kind of comment about Robeson County Indian people, it's always negative, yea, and I'm sittin' in here, and like you know, and they expect me to be just like every other Indian, and you know—they don't know me and half these stories that I hear about you know about dis happened to them and dis or dat, well, this is Pembroke and if anything happens everybody's gonna find out about it but I never hear about dis stuff dat they say that locals do to dem and I just don't git it.

These discussions shifted to a comment by Mary that faculty are “too scared” to live in the local community. It is no secret that few faculty reside in the Pembroke area.

Representation of culture. The students in these sessions expressed their frustration that the University was founded as a school for training their ancestors to be teachers and yet generations later, it appears that American Indians have no place at the institution. Their perception is that the indifferent attitude of the campus administration has replaced the commitment to the institution's history. Mark states, “I think UNCP can do a better job of representing the Native Americans.”

Their frustrations manifest in a number of suggestions and recommendations for improving the representation of tribal culture on the campus. Ruth describes her vision of a house for American Indians to gather so they can take courses in some of the cultural practices of our ancestors that are disappearing.

Dis school wuz built for us and people should be learnin' about us. I mean, we're one of the top Indian schools in da nation. Dat's importan and if we're held to dat high standard, what are we doin' to uphold dat title—to back it up—nothing really—Besides throwing a pow wow or during November sumthin for Native American month. Why just during dat time? I mean, I thank, dey should do more stuff. These sororities and fraternities should learn first-hand der not 'bout doin' nothin' for Native Americans. And like me and dis older woman was talkin' in class—der needs to be more programs out here. Der should be a buildin' somwur and offer courses for Native Americans—for da students out here to take if you want to learn agriculture, if you want to learn sewin'—if you want to learn pottery and dis and dat—to bring back dat stuff where dey cain't git nowhere else becuz dis is a Native American college, dey should have a buildin' for uz to go to and feel cumfortable. Not sayin' dat udder races couldn't be der but you know—be as a family amung each udder and learnin' our stuff and I really feel dey need a buildin' like dat out here.

Ruth's recommendation for a gathering place for American Indian students includes a component so that elders in the community can teach "culture classes." This could be a place for Indian students to commune but she adds that all students and faculty would be welcome to attend culture classes to expand their knowledge of the culture and traditions of the Lumbee. Tinto's (1993) notion of sub-communities aligns positively with Ruth's suggestion for gathering place for Native students.

He states, "[S]maller campus communities, formal and informal, may play an important role in enabling newcomers to find an early physical, social, and academic anchorage during the transition to college life" (p. 125). Tinto adds that for minority

students, these racial/ethnic subcommunities may serve as “safe havens” (p. 124) to foster the stability necessary for many to persist on predominantly White college campuses.

The students perceive the campus administration is so concerned with equity and equality among racial/ethnic groups that recommending a facility for only Native students would not be without scrutiny. It is important to note that not all students expressed criticism for the campus administration’s representation of tribal culture. Martha and Naomi believe the campus adequately supports American Indian students. They felt that the scholarship support available to Native students and the cultural activities with campus participation in the Annual Lumbee Homecoming events were adequate representation of their tribal culture. Like all the issues discussed in these sessions, the depth of the individual’s cultural identity often determined their position on the topic. In this context, depth can be defined in terms of the connectivity to one’s tribal culture.

Huffman (1999) explains that the individual’s ethnic identity is self-defined:

... the manner in which a person constructs his/her ethnic identity as an American Indian in an institution that does not always recognize or value that identity that is at the heart of cultural conflict dilemmas. The conflict that is produced internally, emotionally, even ephemerally in a particular situation and moment of time yet has a cumulative effect on a person’s life and experience has not been given the attention it deserves.

What is more, the fact that, over time, individual ethnic identity can change complicates our understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and the educational experience. Unlike race, ethnicity is not a thing but a process. That is, race is a social status or a social category (a classification based on perceived physical characteristics). However, ethnicity is the degree of personal attachment to a cultural orientation. (Huffman, 1999, pp. 4-5)

The differing degrees of ethnic identity among the students in this study and their life experiences on the campus and in their tribal community, serve as factors to define the degree to which students perceive their engagement on the campus. I believe this explains the differing opinions on this topic of discussion. Naomi and Martha did not tend to disclose their feelings and opinions of incidents when they were the only Indian in the room nor did they spend much time sharing experiences that illustrate blatant prejudice or discrimination on the campus. The opposite was true for the comments of John and Ruth who were in different Talking Circle sessions. Their levels of disclosure and openness to discuss perceived racial injustice was particularly high.

Campus Involvement

Work study and position as a commuter. As we discussed the experiences of the participants, we examined their level of campus involvement. There appeared to be two significant factors that impact the students' level of involvement on the campus. It is important to note that none of these students live in campus housing, in fact, all but two live at home with their parents. They describe the challenges as commuters. Many describe their first year as a process of simply coming to class and going home with little or no interaction beyond that of the classroom.

Esther describes what a miserable existence the freshman year was for her . . .

My freshman year, like I had said before, I would come to class. I wasn't involved in social events, I didn't go to sport activities. I just mainly go to school, come to class and go home and after that first, my freshman year, I didn't like it cause I wuz like counting days down to when the semester would end.

The turning point for her came when she was awarded a work study assignment as a research assistant in the chemistry department. This opportunity to engage with faculty and other students changed the daily routine of class, then home, that had come to characterize her college experience. This could be considered as a “Transition” period for Esther. Her experiences from the assignment in chemistry represented the transition to higher education for her. Frequently commuter students find it a challenge to make a true connection with the campus community. Mary and John describe college as “just something I do—like a job.” Get up, go to class, come home—Mary realizes that her inability to connect to the school like her high school friends attending NC State and Chapel Hill is a direct result of her commuter status. Interestingly, she adds that living at home with her parents isolated her from the potential distractions from her academic work that she believed she would experience if she were a campus resident. Tinto (1993) agrees that commuter students “. . . may not reap the full rewards that membership in college communities brings” (p. 96). The student comments from this study attest to this notion.

Each of the students described a wide range of activities that occupy their time. Some of these included but were not limited to working 25-30 hours per week, weekly church related activities, sorority obligations, and trying to balance time to spend with friends. Students agreed that a significant amount of time was dedicated to familial obligations. All these responsibilities did not appear to leave much time for academics however the students talked about the necessity of time management skills to coordinate all these obligations.

Students' hectic schedules do not leave much time for extracurricular activities on the campus such as attending concerts, student activities, or sporting events. Tinto (1993) identifies extracurricular activities as components of the Social Integration process, which along with Academic Integration directly and positively impacts college student retention. He suggests that academic and social integration directly impact the student's commitment to their institution and subsequently to degree completion. It should be noted that goal commitment is more influential to student persistence than commitment to the institution. "Sufficiently high goal commitment may lead to persistence in the institution even when little commitment to the institution is present. The phenomenon of 'sticking it out' may be just such a case" (p. 110).

Cultural Conflict

Acting White. The next significant theme in this discussion is the issue of cultural conflict. Here two distinct subthemes emerged. The first of these centered on the rearing of these students in the Lumbee community and the norms and values derived from their upbringing. A less significant subtheme focused on some of the ways in which students were perceived as "acting White" by some members of the Tribe. This perception is often associated with those students who have adopted the bicultural practice of controlling their Lumbee dialect. For example, Naomi describes her discovery that it is necessary to speak in proper English in certain situations on the university campus. This is particularly important in her work study position with the Department of Information Technology in which she is required to work with faculty, staff, and students across campus on technology-related issues.

Some members of the Tribe who do not understand or value higher education accuse college students of “acting White” or “living above their raising.” Matthew challenges this notion. He believes that this does not signify “acting White”—he is simply taking action he believes necessary to provide a better quality of life for his family. Ruth commented that to honor the struggles experienced by her ancestors she must pursue a college education despite the negativity within the Native community associated with her doing so.

“Not how I was raised.” At least half of the students specifically cited Christian values as a component of their rearing or inferred such by their involvement in church-related activities. Robeson County is situated in the middle of this country’s, Bible Belt and therefore, Christian values are the bedrock of the Lumbee community and the core values inculcated in the rearing of Indian children. Even tribal members who do not practice Christian teachings by regular church attendance will profess some knowledge of Biblical teachings from their childhood. The study participants attest that religious teachings are the guidepost of the Lumbee family unit and accordingly have served as a deep-seated component of their tribal heritage for generations. Accordingly, norms and values that function contrary to these teachings result in cultural conflict not only in the campus environment but with general mainstream society. Samuel describes the religious connection we embraced within the Lumbee culture, “Me being a Native American—a Lumbee Native American—Christianity is weaved right into my fiber—my being . . .”

Relative to this issue, Mark asserted, “I was raised to believe that hard work has good reward and that Christianity is your religion and you know, live the best you can by

that.” Mark describes how these encounters on the campus with students who do not value hard work are contrary to his rearing. Hannah also highlights her Christian background, “. . . my family is very Christian-based that’s kinda like what I’ve always known . . .” Matthew shares a similar value from his upbringing, “I was raised in a Holiness Church of God where I was always taught to do what wuz right and that it wuz always best to go to school and getcha education.” Mary, who self-identifies as a strong Lumbee woman, describes an awkward situation with her religion professor whose religious beliefs were contrary to her Christian values. It is interesting the UNCP campus is a melting pot of norms and values that conflict with those of the Indian community that encircles the institution. A number of students describe how discussions with faculty and students with conflicting religious beliefs have solidified the realization that not everyone will share these teachings that have been a part of their culture and highly valued for generations.

The interwoven connectedness of the Lumbee community, on many levels, isolates Indian students from the world outside the tribal family. That isolation shields the knowledge that a representation of the world and all its diverse beliefs and value is right here on this university campus. Colette (1873-1954), a French writer and critic also known as Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, wrote “A happy childhood is poor preparation for human contacts.” Many of the students, reared in the isolation of Native communities, are ill-prepared for the interaction with other cultures on mainstream college campuses and to adapt we must employ some strategies as these girls describe.

Martha shares advice that she has gleaned from this newfound knowledge of the “real” world she discovered on this college campus. “It’s just—you just have to watch what you say in classrooms or religion class or anywhere because some people just takes the offensive.” Similarly, Hannah shares the sentiment in her advice to other Native students,

Now, I kinda have to watch what I say around people becuz of the fact that—becuz growing up in high school, you wuz around the same people all da time and everybody thought the same way. You could say something and everybody around ja would agree wid ja. It’s not like dat now. Now you have to watch what you say or you have to say something around a certain group of people but you know that it’s not something that you can say around another group.

Rearing in Christian values, the foundation for model behavior among believers in our community, is the source of other cultural conflicts that manifest in the manner in which these students perceive the behavior of other non-Native students on the campus. A significant conflict identified is the level of disrespect for faculty exhibited by non-Native students. Esther expresses her discomfort with students that “cuss a lot”—“smoking—little things like that.” She adds that she is not accustomed to the blatant disrespect of students in the classroom. Martha explains how disrespectful it is for students to get up during the class lecture. She describes a student in one of her classes that leaves the room each class period and how this behavior is so disruptive and disrespectful that it causes her discomfort. Naomi concurs and adds that her father has impressed upon her the inappropriateness of interracial relationships—a commonplace practice on such a diverse campus as UNCP. Ruth, who was raised the same way, believes that we are diluting our blood line when we marry and have children outside of

our race. However, there are some in the Lumbee community who believe that it is acceptable to marry White.

Excessive alcohol consumption, drug abuse, interracial relationships, profanity, blatant disrespect of elders—all these behaviors exhibited on the campus are contrary to their “raising.” Martha talks about the challenges for Indian students who live on campus and struggle with the ongoing exposure to these issues that are frequently contrary to their cultural background. Scholars cite cultural conflict as a prominent struggle for Native students on mainstream college campuses (Belgarde & Loré, 2003; Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997; de Anda, 1984; Dehlye, 1995; Horse, 2005; Huffman, 1993, 2001, 2008, 2010; Jackson et al., 2003). There are students who yield to this conflict with their tribal culture. However, the students in this study describe a sense of strength—interwoven in their being as Samuel references—that drives their desire to remain connected with the teachings of their youth. I posit that this strength may be a derivative of maintaining the ties with their families and their tribal community—personal support mechanisms where values are reinforced despite the ongoing external exposure to conflicting norms in the university environment.

Tinto’s Second Stage—Transition

We can now address the second stage of Tinto’s model—Transition. This stage is defined as the phase between separation from old norms and values and transitional adoption of new norms and values associated with the new environmental setting. In this examination of the factors relating to the campus culture and the associated values and norms that come in conflict with the tribal culture of the participants, it appears that these

students perpetually resist the transitioning to the campus culture as that act might possibly compromise any or all elements of their tribal culture. Student unwillingness to fully assimilate to the values and norms of the campus community at the risk of any element of their tribal heritage can be defined as the cultural conflict they encounter on this campus. The values and norms of the Indian community are so interwoven into each of these students that they simply refuse to move through this evolutionary transition phase that Tinto identifies as necessary or a precursor for their persistence. It is important to recognize that individuals like Naomi and Ruth who see the value of adjusting their speech patterns in certain situations do not see this practice as an act of abandonment of their tribal dialect. In fact, one may imply that this practice is a form of bilingual competency. Rendón et al. (2000) introduce the concepts of biculturalism and dual socialization to explain how minority students can indeed make the transition to a college setting.

Adaptive Biculturalism

The students in this study exhibit a variety of adaptive strategies in navigating between their tribal culture and the expectations of the mainstream culture on the University campus. This conceptual model of simultaneously navigating multiple worlds is not new to the research literature, found in the work on acculturation and biculturalism. Mistry and Wu (2010) define this particular phenomenon as a model that has “evolved through an integration of literature from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including developmental psychology, cultural psychology, sociology, and cultural studies” (pp. 5-6). Their specific research examines this framework within the context of immigrants and

their associated adaptive behaviors. Similarly, the students in this study exhibit similar behavior in their conscious and deliberate decisions to suppress their tribal dialect in both verbal and written formats, social network clustering, actively seeking faculty mentoring, and the anchor factor of maintaining familial relationships through the higher education process.

Much past and current scholarship examining challenges of American Indians in mainstream higher education tend to focus primarily on deficit models, or how Native students don't "measure up" with their non-native peers. I propose constructing the experiences of these Indian students within the context of adaptive biculturalism where the principle focus is one of success.

There are clearly conflicts that manifest for the Native students in this study when their experiences are examined within the framework of Tinto's three-stage model.

There are a number of important areas in which Tinto's model simply does not apply to the retention and graduation rate behavior of Native students. These incongruences suggest that Tinto's model is not appropriate for examining many important student characteristics that frame early college experiences in Native students and play a central role in the formulation of student intent to either stay at their particular institution, transfer to another four or two year institution, suspend their college enrollment plans temporarily, or simply drop out of college entirely.

For example, in the "Separation" stage, the notion that students disconnect from their community and in particular familial relationships does not align with the actual experiences of these students. However, as illustrated in the discussions, the students

exhibit a component of adaptive biculturalism with their practice to disconnect from high school or other social connections with individuals who do not value higher education. The decision to engage in this practice of separating from non-supportive relationships aligns with Tinto's (1993) notion that college students must separate from former relationships that are not conducive to their success in higher education.

In the "Transition" stage, conflict with Tinto's theory manifest with these Native students in terms of the cultural conflict they experience with the norms and values of higher education. One of the prevailing conflicts expressed by the students was the misalignment of their Lumbee dialect with the expectations of campus culture. The majority of the students in this study described experiences surrounding the realization that their tribal dialect was not acceptable in the campus culture. Sheltered in a tribal community where the Lumbee dialect is the norm and accepted by all, many of these students with limited exposure to a life outside their Indian community had any knowledge that their tribal dialect would conflict with what mainstream society considers the norm and acceptable. Questions and remarks regarding the validity and acceptability of their dialect accompanied with poor grades on written assignments reinforced the necessity to execute a deliberate strategy to navigate this challenge in the campus community.

Most of the students acknowledged that the challenges associated with writing in their Lumbee dialect and the difficulties of adapting their writing patterns to align with that acceptable by the campus community. Interestingly, Ruth and Naomi both describe cautionary instruction from their parents regarding the perceived and anticipated

unacceptability of their tribal dialect in the mainstream culture. Interestingly, Naomi was the only student in the group to admit that she suppressed her dialect in certain campus situations. In her work study position on campus, she would speak in proper English when she engaged with UNCP faculty and staff. In situations after the Talking Circle session with Naomi, I required her technical assistance and our conversation remained comfortable in our Lumbee dialect. It was imperative that the Lumbee dialect be accepted and honored in the Talking Circle sessions. For this reason, I engaged the students in our tribal dialect throughout these discussions. I believe that this particular approach increased student self-disclosure, provided students with a sense of interpersonal “safety”, and underscored for the students the centrality and import of this aspect of our shared culture.

With respect to Tinto’s (1993) premise that students must transition to the norms and values of the campus environment, these students affirm the necessity of assimilating with the expectation to use proper English in verbal and written form. However, these students do not completely abandon their tribal dialect in order to align with this mainstream expectation. For this reason, traits of adaptive biculturalism are evident in their decision to align writing assignments with the proper English requirement of the UNCP faculty. Additionally, Naomi added the practice of suppressing her tribal dialect in situations where she perceived that there would be questions or challenges to the perceived validity of its use. The decision to adapt to the expectations of the campus environment should not be viewed by students as abandonment of tribal culture but conversely a survival skill. This practice of navigating two worlds as delineated in the

acculturation literature represents a common survival tactic employed by many racial/ethnic groups for survival in mainstream society (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Hill, 2010; Rudolph, Chavez, Quintana, & Salinas, 2011).

Ryder, Alden, and Paulhus (2000) describe two prominent formulations in the acculturation process—the unidimensional model and the bidimensional model. The unidimensional model represents a bicultural who has made the decision to abandon all elements of their culture for the adoption of another. Conversely, individuals who navigate two worlds, maintaining their culture while adopting elements of another represent the bidimensional model. “[I]ndividuals may adopt many of the values and behaviors of the mainstream culture without giving up facets of self-identity developed in their culture of origin” (Ryder et al., 2000, p. 49). The Native students in the study who decided to temporarily modify elements of their culture to persist as a means of transitioning to the campus culture would align with this bidimensional model. Ryder et al. (2000) cite John Berry’s (1980, 1984) work as the most widely cited bidimensional model.

Berry expands on this bidimensional model in an international collaborative effort with colleagues in this field of study. The work of Berry et al. (2006) examines acculturation within the context of immigrant youth with Berry’s contribution of bidimensional model to this discussion. In a continuation from previous work in this area, Berry (1974, 1980) suggests there are two salient issues in this bidimensional model—to what extent are individuals willing to maintain their culture and heritage and to what

extent do these individuals desire involvement in the mainstream culture. It is from these two questions, Berry derives a four-sector framework for defining the level of acculturation individuals may seek to employ.

Berry et al. (2006) outline these four areas as follows:

Assimilation is the way when there is little interest in cultural maintenance combined with a preference for interacting with the larger society. Separation is the way when cultural maintenance is sought while avoiding involvement with others. Marginalisation exists when neither cultural maintenance nor interaction with others is sought. Integration is present when both cultural maintenance and involvement with the larger society are sought. (p. 306)

Interestingly, the final of these four ways of acculturating is quite different from the third stage of Tinto's (1993) Model. Tinto (1993) suggests that for full integration to the campus environment, college students must abandon the norms and values of their formal community for adoption of those in the university setting. Berry's (1974, 1980) and Berry et al.'s (2006) work within the context of this bidimensional view more closely aligns with the behavior of the students in this study. The decision to modify components of their tribal culture such as the Lumbee dialect in verbal and written form, suggest that these students have no desire to fully abandon their indigenous culture and heritage for the purpose of integrating to the mainstream culture as the assimilationist's models would suggest. With this thought, this discussion will continue with strategies employed by the students in this study to "artificially" integrate to the norms and values of the campus culture.

Support Mechanisms or Driving Forces

Supportive faculty/engagement with faculty. Support mechanisms and driving forces that contribute to the persistence or success of the students in this study emerged as an important contributing factor to student success. At the end of each Talking Circle session, students were asked if they could cite factors that they believed contributed to their persistence. Many of the students described supportive relationships with faculty as a major source of support and encouragement during their college career. Luke did reference the necessity of hiring more American Indian faculty but as the students discussed their relationships with faculty on campus, none specifically referenced a requirement that these faculty must be American Indian. As previously noted in chapter one, students at TCUs reported that faculty, in their roles as “motivators, mentors, and support systems...” were a significant element to their overall educational experience (pp. IHEP, 2006, 17-18). Museus and Quaye (2009) also cite support from faculty as a factor in the academic success of college students because they believed that faculty foster the relationships necessary to have positive college experiences and to provide a venue to support and encourage their cultural heritage.

Tinto (1993) also attributes interaction with faculty as a contributing factor in the persistence for college students. He describes these student/faculty relationships as “an essential component of the intellectual and social life of the institution” (p. 167). Astin (1993) also suggests that “Students who interact frequently with faculty are more satisfied with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships,

variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even administration of the institution” (p. 223).

American Indian faculty often provide the cultural connections with Native students that foster the kinship bond that non-Native faculty are unwilling or unable to establish. However, this in no way relegates the responsibility for student support to only American Indian faculty. Non-Native faculty who possess a willingness and commitment to honor the culture and heritage of their Indian students can quite productively serve as support systems for these students. There is a significant benefit to the faculty member and the student when the relationship begins with a deep respect for both parties. The students in this study who encountered negative experiences with faculty describe stereotypical remarks that demean the value of their tribal heritage. Learning for Native students is not conducive in such discriminatory environments much less engaging with faculty of this nature outside the classroom setting.

Another factor germane to the import of faculty support to Native students is the opportunity to engage with faculty outside the classroom setting. For example, Esther discusses the difficulty encountered during her first year in college but how her perspective was changed when she was assigned a work study with Dr. Sivanadane Mandjiny, Professor and Acting Department Chair in Chemistry and Physics. Dr. Mandjiny has a reputation of involving Native students in research projects many supported by significant external funding sources and generating significant public and scholarly interest. His ancestry is of Eastern India decent and Lumbee students note that

despite their different religious beliefs, he exhibits the level of respect for their culture to encourage their participation in scientific research projects.

Self-determination/desire to be an example. The participants describe numerous obstacles that would contribute to the drop-out of many students despite their racial/ethnic background. Some of the challenges shared here involved coping with medical challenges, the death of a mother from cancer, parents who file bankruptcy, supporting two children without a steady income, caring for sick parents, among a very long list of challenges. Additionally, a number of these students are working near full-time jobs while simultaneously enrolled fulltime at the University.

Each one shares their list of people to whom they feel they are accountable—parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, their own children and even generations of Native youth to come. Esther states, “I’ve got little brothers and sisters that I’ve got to set that example for them...” Naomi shares the sentiment that she is responsible to set an example for her younger brother and sister. Ruth describes her responsibility to carry on the legacy of higher education in her family. “I just knew that in honor of family and all dat dey have done, that I had to continue that legacy on for my children and set the examples for my brothers and sisters.” These students are steadfast in the sense of self-determination and obligation to be an example to their family and the Indian community as a whole. In an interview with Dr. Malinda Maynor Lowery, a Lumbee professor at UNC Chapel Hill, I asked her, “What advice would you give Indian students struggling in mainstream higher education?” Her response was, “Never quit, I

would say never quit. You ancestors didn't literally die for you to have access to an education—for you to quit” (M. M. Lowery, personal communication, May 10, 2010).

This sense of determination and perseverance is a value that has sustained the Lumbee community through many struggles—segregation, loss of major industry as a result of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Act) and now the most recent decline in the regional economy. The oral traditions of Lumbee Indians cite the perseverance to be steadfast through difficult times and these students represent that strength—strength from generations of Lumbee people who challenged notions and expectation to quit when times were difficult and the future uncertain.

The family—A facilitator. Perhaps the single most important factor that the participants cite as a support mechanism/driving force is family support. This was by far the most frequently cited theme in this discussion of Native college student persistence. Without question, family is at the core of existence for people of the Lumbee Tribe. For the Lumbee, family is not limited to the Eurocentric definition of the nuclear family. Family, for the Lumbee People, includes the extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and the far reaching scope of relatives who make up the family circle. Tinto's notion that college students must disconnect from past communities such as family connections is not applicable to Lumbee students at Pembroke. In previous studies that I have conducted with Native students at Pembroke, more than 80 percent attest to interaction with their family at least five days during the week—even campus residents from the local community would often visit with their extended families on weekends. The core of the Lumbee community is the family unit and severing those ties is not a

viable consideration for many Indian students. This is particularly true when students cite family support as the most important factor in their persistence in college.

Jackson et al. (2003) cited family support as the most prevalent surface theme in their research of American Indian college student persistence.

Students talked about the strong encouragement and support they received from one or both of their parents or a first- or second-degree relative, such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle. In many cases the encouragement was almost an imperative to be academically successful. (p. 553)

Mark, one of the study participants, asserts that family support is the primary motivator for his persistence. He shares that his parents provide monetary support for his education but their support also includes the encouragement and emotional support that he finds necessary to continue his educational journey.

Luke shares his feelings about the encouragement that he receives from his grandmother. Despite her limited education, she desires a better life for her children and grandchildren. Luke states,

My grandmother, she was born into a sharecropping family, and um, she had always told me all my life that, 'If I'd had the opportunity to go to school, I wouldda went.' But you see, she didn't get that opportunity, she ended up quttin' school, I believe, when she was in the 6th grade—just to work—to tend to the farm and um, she ended up gettin' married when she was 18 and uh, she still farmed for two years but she and my grandfather got married and then she went to Converse to start workin'—as a matter of fact, that's when she got her first license when she's about twentysome years old—just so she could go back and forth to work. But she's always pushed education on me because she didn't have the opportunity to get it like she wanted to. To this day, she's kinda embarrassed because she really can't read all dat well and she has me to help her out and she's like—'You know, I wish I could've went to school and everythang so I could've learn how to read and write better.' But that's the reason she had to really be my biggest motivation, I mean, there's been times when I worked at Campbell Soup,

when I got dat job offer, dey um, I mean my parents even said, ‘Maybe you want to just start working, I mean, it’s a job, you know.’ But my grandma never doubted me, you know, she’s always been der to help me. She’s even helped me from time to time to buys books sometimes too. I know one semester I needed to borrow some money for some—for the tuition out here and she let me borrow da money. So, she’s always been my biggest motivation.

The theme of this particular narrative is clearly in conflict with Tinto’s assertion that college students must or should disconnect from former communities (including family) in order to increase the likelihood of retention. This study found that the connections (including ongoing contact) with the extended family unit are, in fact, a major contributing factor behind the persistence of Native college students. The familial bond is so strong for many Indian students that a detachment from the family unit would present a significant barrier to college persistence instead of facilitate the process.

The family—A potential barrier. The clear consensus of the students interviewed was the belief that family support facilitated their college persistence to the senior year. However, there was elaborate discussion of how family can serve as a potential barrier to degree attainment. This is certainly not the norm but worthy to mention that some students encounter challenges associated with the family unit. These potential barriers are more interpersonal and internal than actual tangible challenges that might hinder educational goal attainment of the student. For example, Mark shares a challenge he experienced when his grandfather became ill and then died shortly thereafter. Mark felt that his personal obligation to the family was such that he was compelled to attend first to the needs of the family during this difficult time. He purposefully chose not to devote the attention necessary and required to his studies. This

temporary hurdle did not represent a significant delay in his college career—it simply resulted in taking some extra courses during an academic summer session to catch up on that which he had missed while attending to his familial obligations. Mark acknowledges that it was a significant challenge to simultaneously balance a commitment to his family and his academic responsibilities. However, he felt strongly that there was never a question of skirting his familial responsibilities during the sickness and death of his grandfather.

Matthew, the only first generation college student in the group interviewed for this study, describes the challenges that he experienced with his own family. It was obvious from his comments in the Talking Circle sessions that his parents did not have an awareness of the time and effort commitment necessary for college attendance and they subsequently made demands of his time that required his assistance. Like Mark, Matthew instinctively chose to direct his attention, time, and effort to his family needs, which resulted in the obvious neglect of academic matters. Matthew share his experiences . . .

I know when I graduated high school, I was livin' wid my momma—basically—all my life until I turnt 18 and when I graduated high school, I moved out and I stayed wid my cuzin cause me and him worked and we went half on everything and the transition wid me movin' out and my momma didn't agree wid it because she wanted me to stay at home but I knew dat I needed to get away from home, in order to grow up and be more independent and me moving out, gettin' away from my family, helped me get though college because I know if I wuz at home, there would be problems at home that I'd have to be worried about, there'd me more stuff dat they wanted me to do that would take away from my time—me goin' to work and school wuz enuff. So, when I got off work, I could go home and get my homework done, I wouldn't have to go to my parents and talk to dem and talk to my sister and have to hear about what dey went through. It was easier for me just to leave home than it wuz to be at home because I know wid family dey bring

more problems and they really don't realize what college is all about and what kind of work you have to do. Whereas sometimes, you'll have a test da next day and you'd want to study at night, and whereas when you're at home, people's always at your house doin' summin. Where me and my cousin, we both went to school and we helped each other out on work. Helped get through college easier.

Matthew now has the responsibility of two children ages one and seven years old. His fatherly responsibilities and obligations limit his involvement on campus because he wants to be at home to spend time with his own family immediately after his classes. He does not view his family as a barrier to his persistence—it has simply changed the nature of his commitments as a student.

The family unit is such a critical element of the Lumbee community that the idea of attending college without the support of family is unconscionable for Indian students. Naomi shared her view of how her position in the family has changed to the “mother role” since her family lost her mother to cancer during her sophomore year. As a young woman, this is quite a significant change in responsibility but she views it as her obligation to the family and has developed a workable schedule to balance school, work, church and her family. It is not that family is a barrier to her education—it is simply a matter of developing the skills to balance their obligations and the drive and self-determination that is critical to college student persistence—aids these students in balancing school and their familial responsibilities.

Tinto's Third Stage—Incorporation

The third and final stage of Tinto's model is labeled “Incorporation” and this phase is defined by the full integration of the student into the campus setting, having fully assimilated to campus values and norms. This process of shifting from one community to

another (e.g. the campus community) involves a concerted effort to successfully connect and function within the norms and values of the new setting. I felt it appropriate to introduce this discussion of the third phase of Tinto's model after the narrative of all the associated challenges and barriers experienced by American Indian students on the UNCP campus. As previously mentioned, the data associated with the retention, graduation and engagement of American Indian students illustrates that the academic achievement of American Indians is equal to and/or greater than their non-Native peers on the campus. However, this does not reflect a shift from one community to another and as such a full incorporation to the campus community.

In Chapter II, a caveat was stressed that there are elements of Tinto's model that are applicable to the experiences of American Indian students. However, like other Eurocentric theories and models that scholars attempt to apply without thoughtful modification to Native populations, scholars often fail to fully consider key elements of indigenous communities including the fabric of tribal culture and how these elements correspond with the suggested model. The student participants in this study highlighted elements within their tribal culture that would not be comprised by them for the achievement of an established goal, in this particular example—persistence to their senior year in college and ultimately their graduation. Elements of Tinto's model that suggest American Indian students will compromise familial bonds or indigenous norms and values make this theoretical framework inapplicable.

In fact, Tinto cautions the oversimplification of this “complex and fluid” phenomena of student departure. The lines distinguishing the stages of separation,

transition, and incorporation may not always be clearly visible (pp. 94-95). There may be instances when certain student populations may not experience, or need to experience, all three phases of Tinto's model. In this study, the Native students did partially experience elements of the first two stages but a full integration as represented in the final stage of Tinto's model is not evident in this group of students. I would suggest that the need to abandon familial connections and fully disregarding all tribal norms and values for the purpose of inculcating the values, norms and culture of the campus culture is not necessary, healthy, or wise.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Huffman (2008) asserts, "Among some of the more prominent factors reported to be associated with educational success are family support, importance of faculty and mentors, personal determination, and a strong sense of cultural identity" (p. 47). In this study, these were also found to be among the most salient themes that surfaced from discussions with the students at UNCP. Concluding this study, I surmise that family is the key element for the persistence of the study participants.

A majority of the American Indian students enrolled at UNCP are members of the Lumbee Tribe and therefore, reside in the immediate counties surrounding the campus. The relative proximity of this campus to the home communities of these students does not necessitate their disconnection from the family unit—as Tinto suggests. As reflected in the narratives of these Indian students, maintaining the familial ties facilitated their persistence.

An accepted element of the culture of higher education is to purposely disconnect parental involvement in the process of degree attainment for college students so that the college can inculcate the students and “smooth” their transition, acclimation, and integration to the values, norms and culture of the institution. The enactment of FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) introduced significant challenges for parental involvement in their child’s college career. Parents are accustomed to direct engagement with the school regarding their child’s education but college culture is not conducive to this level of involvement. Such legislation and pejorative terms like “helicopter parents” send a message that parents should not be involved in the college education of their children. However, campus administrators have deemed it necessary to broaden the scope of parental involvement. For example, Freshman Orientation events are days when the campus is filled with incoming freshman and their parents.

Campus-organized events to maintain parental involvement would send a different message to parents—one that supports their participation in the student’s education. This is particularly important for families like Matthew’s who do not understand the commitment necessary for college degree attainment. Unfortunately, the only time many of these parents are welcomed to the college campus is on the day of graduation—when they see their student walk across the stage to receive their earned degree. Most often have no idea what a challenge the process could be for their children because they have not had the experience themselves.

It would benefit the institution to develop programs to foster the involvement of Native parents beyond the freshman orientation. Parents and students would benefit from

an organized orientation event to support the entry into their sophomore, junior and even senior years in college. There is a significant and relevant timeframe between their first day and graduation. The integration to the university campus, as referenced by Tinto, may be facilitated by programs to support the involvement of Native families.

The discussions of inadequate academic preparedness neglect to include the value of partnerships with Public Schools of Robeson County. There is a significant disconnect between the level of knowledge that students gain in high school and what is required to successfully persist in a university setting. Partnerships between the local school system and the institution should be facilitated for the purpose of developing programs to bridge the gap between secondary education and college. For example, faculty in English can conduct summer workshops for high school teachers to share the expectations of freshman English courses. Saturday academies should be scheduled to provide tutorials in writing for state-mandated End-of-Grade Writing Exams. The college administration should establish a clear message that initiatives to foster partnerships between university faculty and local school systems will be supported. Summer bridge programs should be available to support the transition from high school to the university setting.

Esther raised an important issue when she described how engagement with Dr. Mandjiny changed her college experience. Work study provided this student with an opportunity to engage her professor outside the class lectures. Student/faculty engagement serves to foster an important relationship that is beneficial for the student and the faculty member. As previously stated and evidenced in the student narratives, faculty support is not limited to American Indian faculty. It encompasses those

individuals who are willing to express an interest in the educational needs of Indian students. Non-Native faculty can support Indian students but there must be an understanding of their tribal culture that is not built on erroneous stereotypes and misconceptions.

The Institution currently supports the Pembroke Undergraduate Research Center and Creativity Center (PURC). Faculty members are encouraged to promote their research agendas through PURC with the assistance of undergraduate students serving as research assistants. I believe the student/faculty engagement process with Native students would be facilitated with an interdisciplinary research agenda in American Indian topics. The Nursing faculty could explore medical issues germane to the Lumbee community. Local Native physicians would be invited to participate with Indians students and their faculty mentor in these research projects. The same could apply to faculty and students in the School of Business. A component of the annual PURC Symposium could be presentations by Native students in their areas of research. I believe the opportunities to speak before an audience would also promote self-determination and the sense of cultural identity among American Indian students.

The history of UNC Pembroke is grounded in American Indian culture and the institution should always seek to preserve that history. I believe that as the University has become more racially/ethnically diverse, the preservation of this institution's mission to support American Indian students is diminishing with efforts to support a multicultural student population. I believe in the value of every student but you simply cannot change the roots of the University and the perception is that it is a dishonor to the Lumbee

community that students have lost their sense of belonging at an institution founded for American Indians. I support Ruth's notion that general education curriculum should include courses in Lumbee culture. A lack of education is the source of many of the misconceptions associated with the Lumbee People.

A component of New Faculty Orientation is a tour of the local community with two faculty with a wealth of knowledge of the Lumbee Tribe. Unfortunately, the campus administration mandates other areas of the New Faculty Orientation program but elect to make this component optional. As such, this sends a message to the new faculty that it is not necessary to have knowledge of the Indian community surrounding this institution. There should be required programs to educate both students and faculty in the history and culture of the Lumbee People. This will begin the process of addressing the stereotypes that Indians students are subjected to on the UNCP campus.

Suggestions for Further Research

The discussions of adaptive biculturalism would benefit from further research on the characteristics of students who exhibit the behaviors of biculturalism to persist to graduation versus those students who refuse to employ these mechanisms and ultimately decide to discontinue their pursuit of higher education.

- Based on the experiences of these students, I believe that it would benefit the campus administration to conduct a university-wide study to assess the misconceptions associated with American Indian students and the local Indian community.

- A study to compare the experiences of American Indian students at UNCP with those Native students at other campuses in the system.
- One of the limitations of this study is that the students were not tracked from admission to the institution to their senior year. I believe it would be beneficial to examine a control group of Indian students from their freshman year of college to graduation. Incorporating regular Talking Circle sessions would provide students with an outlet to share the challenges they experience at the time they occur.
- Pending the implementation of an American Indian research agenda with Pembroke Undergraduate Research Center and Creativity Center (PURC), it would be beneficial to examine the experiences of the faculty and Native students involved in the research projects compared to that of non-Native students to gauge the level of engagement.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

The history of American Indian education is a plethora of assimilative practices for invalidating Native ways of knowing. Early English settlers surmised Indian education as inferior and certainly inadequate in the process of educating “savage” Natives to the norms and values they deemed proper and without question for them—superior. These narrow-minded Eurocentric ideologies continued to serve as the guiding principles for American education from government-operated Indian boarding schools to the 21st century fights over school choice. In the midst of the “White-washing” of American education, Natives struggle for a solid platform on which to provide culturally-relevant education for Indian students.

One of the most significant challenges in American Indian education is the notion that the development of any strategies for educating Indians must be conceived within the context of Anglo-Saxon theories, paradigms, and ideologies—all of which are conceptualized for the sole purpose of educating White students. As such, scores of scholars propose theoretical frameworks for examining the experiences of college students within the assimilationist ideologies of Vincent Tinto’s work. Native scholars must challenge a generalized theory that suggests all Indian students experience college in the same manner. Therefore, the erroneous assumption that White college students

should serve as the frame of reference for gauging the experiences of all student populations perpetuates the challenges for all minorities in mainstream high education.

The findings of this study support the argument for developing indigenous theoretical frameworks applicable to Native college students. However, recognizing the role of culture in the development of any indigenous paradigm is a fundamental component that validates the process. The level to which Native students self-identify with the culture of their tribal community contributes to the processes employed to negotiate their position in mainstream higher education. For example, the Lumbee students in this study with a stronger connection to their cultural identity appeared to struggle with the strategy of modifying their tribal dialect to navigate the campus culture. Additionally, these students challenged the notion that campus administration valued the presence of Lumbee culture on the campus.

In addition to culture, historical perspectives of mainstream society contribute to the degree of variation in the experiences of Native college students. For example, Christianity is at the core of the Lumbee community but the history of conversion for many Western tribes is one of a process used by missionaries and boarding schools to suppress and even annihilate tribal culture. For this reason, Christian value systems may not serve as a variable in an indigenous paradigm to examine the experiences of college students from Western tribes. Based on studies in Lumbee communities and other tribes in southeastern North Carolina, Christian norms and values may potentially serve as a viable component of an indigenous research paradigm.

The development of a culturally-relevant research paradigm abandons the Eurocentric, assimilative ideologies for a system comprised of the core elements of the study population. In this particular paradigm, it was valuable to make the connection between the core values and beliefs of the Lumbee community and the manner in which the students employed these to negotiate/navigate their position on the mainstream campus. This process included the adoption of culturally-appropriate data-collection methods such as Talking Circle discussions; abandoning the Eurocentric qualitative-research practice of taking copious field notes during discussions with the study participants; and the methods to establish rapport and respect with American Indians. These variables serve to develop an indigenous research paradigm more applicable to examining the experiences of Indian students—more specifically, Lumbee students in southeastern North Carolina.

Many educational research studies present the experiences of Native students in mainstream higher education as a process of assimilative practices to negotiate campus environments. The findings of this study indicate that the processes employed by these students to negotiate their position in higher education does not necessarily result in integration to the mainstream environment but is more a matter of how each individual perceives their position on the campus and the adaptive strategies employed for achieving their goal of degree attainment. For such a purpose, this indigenous paradigm fashions a success model contrary to many of the deficit models indicative of so many studies in American Indian education.

The initial goal of this study was to examine the applicability of a modified Eurocentric model to the experiences of Native college students. However, the findings are of a greater magnitude than simply following the trend to align Indian education with a supposedly superior White model. This study is a challenge to educational researchers to detach from this practice of modifying Anglo-Saxon theoretical frameworks for application to Native populations. Lewis Meriam, in his 1920s report on Indian education, recognized the value of tribal culture in the education of American Indians. It is my assertion that the continued practice of comparing the education of Native students to that of White students—with mainstream theories and ideologies serving as the frame of reference—may certainly be a contributing factor to impeding the progress of educating Indian students in American educational systems. This practice of failing to recognize the value of tribal culture in the lives of American Indian students perpetuates the same assimilative nature of government-operated Indian boarding schools.

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